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BRAND

By *MILES MENANDER DAWSON*

POEMS OF THE NEW TIME.

KISMET, A POETICAL TRAGEDY AFTER A GREEK
MODEL.

THE ETHICS OF CONFUCIUS.

HENRIK IBSEN

BRAND

A Dramatic Poem

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE
RHYMED AND IN THE ORIGINAL METRE

BY

MILES MENANDER DAWSON



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TO THE MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

Whose earnest and unremitting labours with me for the first twenty-five years of my life were the chief conatus that, during the next twenty-five years, has held me unwaveringly to the course in this difficult and, because difficult, recurringly disappointing task, notwithstanding the pressure of other, most insistent duties,

In grateful and reverent recognition of the power of her influence, the validity of her precepts and the inspiring power of her confidence and love,

This volume is affectionately inscribed.

INTRODUCTORY

"*Brand* made him instantly famous." The words just quoted are from the biography of Henrik Ibsen, written by Henrik Jaeger. They were also literally correct. Before *Brand* was written, Ibsen had laboured nearly a quarter-century and had produced about one-third of all his dramas; but he was regarded as far short of greatness and indeed wrote this great dramatic poem while away from Norway in self-imposed exile, which he bitterly purposed should be for life.

Brand sang itself at once into the hearts and souls of his countrymen—and of Danes and Swedes, as well; and Ibsen was straightway held in veneration and love, which never ebbed thereafter.

And to this day among Scandinavians the great, cosmic, universal appeal of this drama gives it easily first place in the affection.

Yet *Brand* is comparatively little known to readers of English and certainly by no means so well known to them or so well appreciated by them, as many others of Ibsen's plays, as, for instance, *The Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *The Master Builder*, or even the great companion dramatic

poem, *Peer Gynt*. This, notwithstanding that in the original its appeal is more profound and keener than that of any one of them!

The explanation must be—and is—that the language of the poetry in *Brand* in Ibsen's own tongue has the magic which, for instance, sets forth the psalms of David in the King James' Version—that illumination of diction which alone, by its very limpidity, makes it possible to see and feel great truths—that simplicity and directness which make the sublimest ideas the common property of all men.

And somehow the English translations—four of them, three in verse, have already been published—have fallen so far short of this that *Brand* remains well-nigh a closed and sealed book for English-speaking people.

Will this version suffice to alter that deplorable situation?

It should, if it is a dramatic poem that would make its way if it were original as it here appears in English—in short, if it is now English poetry of an order in itself worth the while. Otherwise, it is unlikely that it will or can.

How difficult the task is which has been undertaken, has not been unknown to me. I have felt, with increasing humility, from year to year, as I have taken out my manuscript and revised and re-revised, the truth of Saintsbury's trenchant comment:

"Translations of verse in verse are, very frequently, not worth the paper they are written

on; become of supreme value scarcely once in a hundred years; and, in almost every case, when written by a poet, take the place of something that would have been of much greater value."

This work has continued through a full quarter-century. Indeed, it is that long since the great poet sent me, after examining my first draft of his first act, that prized letter in his copper-plate chirography that promised his authorization—which promise he well kept, (for he gave it to no other) despite the interminable delay, due to my determination to make this as good English poetry as some faculty for writing poetry and infinite pains could make it, when inspired by a lasting glow of love for the resonance, force, originality, genius and elevation of one of the greatest of the poems of all time, as it flows forth in the noble, living Norse tongue.

Therefore, whether or no the verdict of my fellows whom I fain would serve by opening to them the joys which have long possessed me, be that this trust has been kept faithfully and well, to their pleasure and benefit, it cannot but be that good will come from the long, earnest, unflagging devotion to the performance of this trust—even though that good be only the sense of having done all that in me lies and yet of having fallen far short of the excellence I dreamed of.

M. M. D.

BRAND

PERSONÆ

BRAND.

HIS MOTHER.

EJNAR, *a painter.*

AGNES.

THE SHRIEVE, *a county officer, corresponding to the High Sheriff in England.*

THE PHYSICIAN, *in Norway quasi-official.*

THE DEAN.

THE SACRISTAN.

THE SCHOOLMASTER, *connected with the church.*

GERD, *a half-crazed mountain girl.*

A PEASANT.

HIS HALF-GROWN SON.

ANOTHER PEASANT.

A WOMAN.

A SECOND WOMAN.

A CLERK.

PRIESTS AND OFFICIALS OF CHURCH AND STATE.

A CROWD OF MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

THE TEMPTER IN THE DESERT.

THE INVISIBLE CHOIR.

A VOICE.

The drama takes place in our day, partly in and partly about a parish on one of the fjords upon the west coast of Norway.

BRAND

ACT I.

[Up on the mountain in the snow. The fog lies thick and heavy. It is dark and raining. Brand, clad in black and with a staff and wallet, is making his way westward. A peasant and his half-grown son, who are accompanying him, are somewhat behind him.]

THE PEASANT

Ho, stranger! Not so fast, I say!
Where are you?

BRAND

Here!

THE PEASANT

You go astray.

So thick the fog is where we are,
A man can scarcely see so far
As this staff reaches.

THE SON

Father, here

Are rifts; the glacier must be tearing . . .

THE PEASANT

And here's a wider!

BRAND

And I fear

That we have lost our every bearing.

THE PEASANT. [*Cries out.*]

Stop, man! God help us, but a crust

This shell of ice is! Sir, you must

Not tramp upon it.

BRAND

Hark! I wonder . . .

Did not a cataract resound?

THE PEASANT

A stream has burrowed through and under.

Here is a gulf no man can sound;

Down will it gulp us in a swallow.

BRAND

I must press onward as I told you.

THE PEASANT

Man cannot compass it. Sir, hold you!

The soil is mushy here and hollow.

Stop, man, you set your life at stake!

BRAND

I must press on; I go to take

A great man's message.

THE PEASANT

And his name?

BRAND

His name is God.

THE PEASANT

Be that the same,
What sort of man are you?

BRAND

A priest.

THE PEASANT

Just so! But though you be at least
A bishop, yet before the dawn,
You'll gasp in death if you go on
Along the drifts' o'erhanging edge
As if upon a solid ledge.

*[He draws near with an air of warning and
persuasion.]*

Hark, priest! However wise the while,
One cannot do more than he can.
Turn back! Be not so stubborn, man!
One has a single life to lose;
That gone, what is there left to choose?
The nearest settlement's a mile;
And there is such a fog o'erhead
And all about us here today
That you could cut it with a knife.
You go at peril of your life.

BRAND

When fogs are dense, one is not led
By jack-o'-lantern's gleam astray.

THE PEASANT

But there are ice-tarns hereabout
And such tarns are no laughing matter.

BRAND

I'll walk across them.

THE PEASANT

Walk on water?

Your promises will not hold out!

BRAND

Yet one hath shown, with faith in God
A man may walk across dry-shod.

THE PEASANT

In bygone ages; nowadays
He finds the bottom; there he stays.

BRAND. [*Setting forth.*]

Farewell!

THE PEASANT

Your life you put at naught.

BRAND

If God hath use my life to take,
Then welcome cataract, torrent, lake!

THE PEASANT

That was indeed a madman's thought!

HIS SON. [*Half sobbing.*]

Let us turn back! That tempest's humming
Means that a harder storm is coming.

BRAND

[*Stops and retraces his steps.*]

Hark, peasant! Did I hear you say,
Your daughter, living by the bay,
Has sent you word that she is dying

But cannot, on blest hope relying,
Depart this life ere she behold you?

THE PEASANT

God help me! That is truth I told you!

BRAND

And she has given you till today?

THE PEASANT

Yes, priest!

BRAND

No longer?

THE PEASANT

No.

BRAND

Then come!

THE PEASANT

Impossible! Let us go home.

BRAND

[Fixes his eyes sternly upon him.]

Would you a hundred dollars give
That she might pass away in peace?

THE PEASANT

Yes, priest!

BRAND

Two hundred?

THE PEASANT

As I live,
Her from her terrors to release,
My house and homestead would I sell.

BRAND

But would you also give your life?

THE PEASANT

My life? What are you saying?

BRAND

Well?

THE PEASANT

[*Scratches his head.*]

I've other children and a wife,
In Jesus' name do not forget;
And there must be some limit set.

BRAND

He, whom you called on, it is true,
Had not a wife or child like you.
He had a mother, though.

THE PEASANT

I know;

But that was centuries ago
And many marvels were there then
That man shall never see again.

BRAND

Go home. 'T is idle here to stay!
Go home. Your life is but death's way.
You know not God. He knows not you!

THE PEASANT

Ugh! You are rough.

HIS SON

[*Seizes hold of him.*]

Then come away.

THE PEASANT

Yes, but the priest must with us, too!

BRAND

Indeed, now?

THE PEASANT

Aye, for if you stay
Out in this devilish ugly weather,
And what I cannot hide, they tell . . .
That we came hither, priest, together . . .
I'll be arrested some fine day;
And be condemned to irons and cell,
Should you be drowned in ditch or lake.

BRAND

Then would you suffer for God's sake.

THE PEASANT

I care for neither His nor thine;
I have enough and more with mine.
So come!

BRAND

Farewell!

[A hollow crash is heard in the distance.]

THE SON *[Screaming.]*

There goes a slide!

BRAND

[To the peasant who has seized him by the collar.]

Let go there!

THE PEASANT

No!

BRAND
At once!

THE SON
Come on!

THE PEASANT
[*Wrestling with Brand.*]
Deuce take me!

BRAND
Rest you satisfied;
He surely will ere he is done!
[*Exit Brand.*]

THE PEASANT
[*Sits up rubbing his arms.*]
Oh, but he gave me such a fall!
"The Lord's work" such he dares to call.
[*Cries out as he rises.*]
Ho, priest!

HIS SON
He went across the hill.

THE PEASANT
Yes, but I can just glimpse him still.
[*Cries out again.*]

Hello, there! Can you tell us, you?
Where was it that we left the road?

BRAND
No cross-road signpost you require;
The road you travel on is broad.

THE PEASANT

I would your pleasant jest were true,
Soon would I warm me by my fire.

*[Exeunt the peasant and his son toward
the east.]*

BRAND

*[Brand comes into view higher up and
stands listening.]*

They grope on home. O truckling slave,
Did will well up and in you play,
Did you alone the power crave,
I should relieve you on your way;
You would I, though with bleeding feet,
Bear on my shoulders, glad and fleet.
But help is useless for the man
Who does not will more than he can!

[He steps further forward.]

Life, precious life! It much surprises
How dear to all the folk life is;
For every one his own life prizes
As if the ward of worlds were his
And the salvation of us all
Did on his scrawny shoulders fall.
To sacrifice they are prepared,
But life, by all means, must be spared.

[He smiles at something he recalls.]

Two thoughts came to me as a child,
Convulsing me with fits of laughter,
That got me a good beating after,
If the schoolmistress was not mild.

'T was of a fish with water-fright;
And of an owl that feared the night.
I laughed aloud and vainly tried
To put the foolish dream aside;
But fast it clung with tooth and claw.
What brought that laughter-fit on me?
The contrast that men dimly saw,
Between the thing as, true, it is
And the true thing, as it should be . . .
The man who drags his load along,
Yet finds too great a burden, his!
Each countryman, or sick or strong,
Is such a fish and such an owl.
He was for earnest purpose made
And ought to dwell in life's deep shade;
But that it is affrights his soul.
At low tide's brink the fool fish sprawls;
The owl shuns heaven's vaulted halls.
The fish shrieks: "Smothering! Give me
air!"

The owl, "I want the sun's fierce glare!"
[*He stops for a moment and stands listening.*]

Hark! What is that? 'T was like a strain.
It was a song, with laughter blended.
Hark! One hurrah! Nor is it ended . . .
A third, a fourth, yet one again!
The sun bursts forth, the mists rise and
I view the spreading wastes below.
Out there upon the mountain stand
Gay revellers in the morning glow.

Their shadows stretch toward the west
Along the barren tableland.
They pass a word and grasp of hand
And now they part. The while the rest
Turn to the east, two westward fare;
And now they wave a last farewell . . .
Hats, veils and handkerchiefs in air!

*[The sun breaks further and further
through the clouds. Agnes and Ejnar are
approaching. Brand stands for a long
time looking down upon the two as they
draw near.]*

Light plays about them like a spell.
It is as if the mists gave way
While, 'neath their feet, the heather lay
A carpet o'er the mountain wild,
And on their dalliance heaven smiled.
Brother and sister surely they!
Now hand in hand they tread together
The grassy carpet—hand in hand!
The maiden scarcely skims the heather;
He, too, is graceful as a wand.
Now runs she from him,—toward him
trips—
Eludes when he would seize her close.
The race into a pastime grows,
The laughter into music slips.

*[Enter Ejnar and Agnes in light traveling
costumes, both flushed and warm, racing
across the barren slope. The fog has*

*disappeared; a clear, summer morning
glows upon the mountain.]*

EJNAR

Agnes, my beautiful butterfly,
Thee will I catch a-winging!
I'll make me a net with meshes fine,
The meshes shall be my singing.

AGNES

[Dances backward before him and continually evades his grasp.]

Am I a butterfly, dainty and trim,
Let me drink from the cups of heather,
And, are you a boy with a taste for sport,
Then chase me but catch me never.

EJNAR

Agnes, my beautiful butterfly,
My meshes are all completed.
Thy wavering flight cannot aid thee now;
Soon fast in the net thou art seated.

AGNES

Am I a butterfly, young and bright,
I swing in a dream of pleasure,
My wings will be caught in the whirl of the
net
And motionless, after my seizure.

EJNAR

Nay, gently I'll lift thee upon my hand
And into my bosom thou goest.
There canst thou follow thy whole life long
The merriest game thou knowest.

[*Without realizing it, they have neared a sheer precipice and are standing on its brink.*]

BRAND

[*Cries down to them.*]

Stay, stay! There is a chasm there!

EJNAR

Who shouts?

AGNES

Behold!

BRAND

In time beware!

Upon a hollow drift you stand,
That reaches out beyond the land!

EJNAR

[*Puts his arm around Agnes and laughs softly.*]

Waste not your warning on us!

AGNES

Nay!

We have a lifetime for our play.

EJNAR

To us a sunny path is given
Until a hundred years have flown.

BRAND

I see . . . and then to hell straightway?

AGNES

[*Swings her veil.*]

Nay, then the sport revives in heaven.

EJNAR

A hundred years of pure delight,
With wedding-lamps lit every night;
A lifetime . . . century our own . . .

BRAND

And then . . . ?

EJNAR

Then home again to heaven!

BRAND

Indeed? Then you have journeyed thence?

EJNAR

Why, certainly, if not, then whence?

AGNES

Y-e-s . . . that is, just this moment, priest,
We're from the valley toward the east.

BRAND

I thought I glimpsed you, moving toward
Where the high road turns to the fjord.

EJNAR

Yes, yes! 'T was there we lately parted
From friends, the cherished and true-
hearted,

And set with an embrace or kiss,
A seal on all kind memories.
Come down to us! I will recount
How good to us has been our Lord.
Thus will you, as a fit reward,
Drink with us at good fortune's fount.
Fie! Stand not like a statue there!

Yes, brighten up! That can I bear!
First, I'm an artist, you must know;
Within my soul the power lies
To coax the colors into life,
As God turns worms to butterflies.
It was His greatest favor, though,
To give me Agnes for my wife.
Up from the south I came, my pack
Of artist truck upon my back . . .

AGNES

So radiant and confident . . .
So many, many songs he knew!

EJNAR

Just as I through the village went,
Did Agnes make a visit there.
She came to drink the mountain air,
Spruce perfume, sunshine and fresh dew.
Some good god drove me up the mountain.
It sang in me: "Seek beauty's fountain
Where swaying pine-boughs sough and
shiver

Beside the rushing forest river,
In lofty flights along the blue
And circling heavens!" There my brush
Outdid itself. I painted [*Turning to Agnes.*]

—you,—

My masterpiece; a radiant blush
Upon your cheek, a pair of eyes
Wherein well-being glowing lies,
A smile like tender melodies,
Which sing into the soul their way . . .

AGNES

But scarcely let your vision stray
To her you sketched . . . like one who sees
Yet sees not, drained the flowing cup
Of life and once again stood up
With staff in hand one summer day . . .
To leave me . . .

EJNAR

Then the thought broke through:
"You have, sir, quite forgot to woo!"
Hurrah! In haste I wooed and won
And so 't was settled quite and done.
Our good old doctor was so glad
That of sheer joy he near went mad.
He gave a party three days long
For her and me with dance and song.
Shrieve, justice, sacristan and priest,
The people all came to the feast.
We set forth from the place last night.
The party was not therefore ended;
With waving banners, leafy crowns
Upon our way they us attended,
They fêted us across the downs,
Escorted us along the height . . .

AGNES

Our journey has been like a dance,
Now two and two, now all at once!

EJNAR

Sweet wine from silver flasks we sipped.

AGNES

The night was stirred with many a ditty.

EJNAR

The fog which from the northward dipped,
Fell back from us as we drew nigh.

BRAND

And now you go . . . ?

EJNAR

Unto the city.

AGNES

There dwell my people, sir, and I.

EJNAR

First o'er the furthest hill away!
Next to the harbor in the bay!
With head of steam, on Egir's steed,
Then to our marriage feast we speed!
Then to the southward fly we thither
Like swans when first they test their wings.

BRAND

And there?

EJNAR

A wedded life together
Beyond e'en that the poet sings!
For know that on the hill-top there
Our lives this morn, without a priest,
Were made inviolate from care
And wedded for a pleasure-feast.

BRAND

By whom?

EJNAR

By all the glad concourse.
They set a curse with clang of glasses

On every cloud that dares to force
Its cruel weight upon the grasses
And delicate foliage 'round our nest!
And with warm lips kissed out each word
Which in the language might be heard
Of coming hurricane to warn.
With leaf-crowned heads they us addressed
As joy's own children, nobly born.

BRAND

Farewell!

[*Starts away.*]

EJNAR

[*Studies him a moment, eyeing him closely.*]

No, no! A moment stay!
Go not so hastily away!
It strikes me something in your face,
To me 's familiar . . .

BRAND

Not at all.

EJNAR

Yet am I sure that from some place
At home or school I can recall . . .

BRAND

At school, friends there, I will allow.
I was a boy then . . . now a man.

EJNAR

It surely cannot be . . .
[*Suddenly cries out.*]

It can . . .

It must be—Brand! I know you now.

BRAND

I recognized you all along.

EJNAR

Well met! Upon my soul, well met!
The same old fellow are you yet,
Always unto himself enough,
Who never joined our boisterous throng
Of comrades in their games.

BRAND

'T is true

That I with you was out of place.
Yet truly I was fond of you;
But all you lads of southern race
And I were made of different stuff.
Where first the light by me was seen,
Was on a narrow strip between
A gloomy fjord and frowning hill
Which shades perpetually the spot.

EJNAR

This is your birthplace, is it not?

BRAND

Yes; through it I am passing.

EJNAR

What?

Did you say, "Through it?" Further still?

BRAND

Yes; far and soon, beyond my home.

EJNAR

You are a priest?

BRAND

A chaplain . . . roam
About the country like a hare.
I make my home now here, now there.

EJNAR

Where are you going?

BRAND

[Sharply and abruptly.]

Ask not!

EJNAR

Why not?

Pray tell me!

BRAND *[Alters his tone.]*

If that God deny not,
The ship which now awaiteth you,
Will bear me on my wand'rings, too.

EJNAR

My bridal steed? So not alone
We 're sailing, Agnes, after all.

BRAND

But I go to a funeral.

AGNES

[Shrinks from him.]

A funeral?

EJNAR

But who's to bury?

BRAND

The God you lately called your own.

AGNES [*Draws back.*]

Come, Ejnar!

EJNAR
Brand!

BRAND
 With shroud and pall
Each god, to earth subsidiary,
Shall in the open light of day
Be carried forth and laid away.
The end of such things is at hand.
It is good time, you understand;
'T is years since he began to fail.

EJNAR
Brand, you are ill.

BRAND
 No, sound and hale
As on the mountain-peak the pine,
The juniper on the incline.
It is our period's sickly race
That sorely needeth healed to be.
It only trifles, laughs and plays . . .
Believes a little . . . will not see . . .
Would thrust the incubus of woe
On Him who, so they say, came down
To bear the punishment below.
He wore for you a thorny crown
And, therefore, free to dance are you.
Dance on; but where the dancing ends . . .
That is another matter, friends.

EJNAR

I understand. That song is new,
Yet popular the country through.
You favor, then, the younger school
Which calls life vanity and dust
And sternly teaches that we must
Repent in sackcloth and in ashes,
To 'scape the devil's taunts and lashes
And torment in the fiery pool.

BRAND

I am no ranting sermonizer.
Not as the church's priest speak I, sir.
That I'm a Christian is not sure;
But sure it is I am a man
And sure, I see and I can cure
The wound that doth our country ban.

EJNAR

Indeed, then, is our land so rated?
I never heard 't was celebrated
For surplus of the quality
Of merriment and jollity.

BRAND

Nay! Joy doth in no bosom swell;
If so it did, then were it well.
If truly ye be serfs of pleasure,
Be such, then, with no let or measure!
Be ever so, be so alway!
Be not one character today
And quite another on the morrow!
Be what you are, with all your heart,
Not piecemeal only and in part!
The Bacchants were ideal; they

Kept up a constant round of revel.
A sot who swings from drink to sorrow
Is but a pitiable devil.
Silenus is a fine *figure*,
A tippler 's but his caricature.
If you will tramp the country through
And listen to each person, you
Will find he is endeavoring
To be a bit of everything.
A little solemn—that is, Sundays!
'T would quite be out of place on Mondays.
Like his own sires, now saint, now sinner—
In moral conduct mainly true,
But a bit jovial after dinner—
That were his sage ancestors, too!
Sometimes a somewhat tender heart he
Gives signs of owning, at a party
When, silence reigning in the hall,
Some plaintive ballad stirs the small
But mountain-rooted mountaineers
Who never meet a blow with tears.
A little free in promising;
Exacting, when required to face
The word passed at a gathering
To be fulfilled on serious days.
In all his doings incomplete;
But little progress or retreat!
A fraction in great things and small,
In good, in evil and in all!
The trouble in all things he tries, is:
One part the other neutralizes.

EJNAR

An easy thing it is to visit
Your scorn, but more becoming is it
To say that "human 't is to err, . . . "

BRAND

Perhaps, but not so wholesome, sir!

EJNAR

That men are faulty, I agree;
But truly, Brand, I do not see
How all that touches Deity—
The God whom you would fain dethrone . . .
My God, whom I am proud to own!

BRAND

You are a painter. Show to me
The God you speak of. I am told
That you have painted Him, and this
Your most effective picture is.
Then, tell me of Him! Let us see!
Now, in the first place, was He old?

EJNAR

Yes, rather . . .

BRAND

Certainly; and grey!
With scanty locks upon His head
And beard like snow or silver thread!
Benign, yet stern enough to scare
Too timid children, in their bed!
Whether you had Him slippers wear,
I do not think worth while to say;
But for a being of His class is
A skull-cap suitable . . . and glasses.

EJNAR

[*Angrily.*]

What do you mean to . . . ?

BRAND

'T is no jest,

Oh, shame that such must be confessed!

Just such a thing He is to see,

To whom our people bend the knee.

As papists make a puling toddler

Of Christ, the hero, do you alter

The Lord to a decrepit coddler

In second childhood soon to falter.

And as on Peter's chair the man

Will soon have left but burglar-keys,

So narrow ye from pole to pole

God's kingdom to the little span

Of churches' man-made boundaries.

You life from faith and precept sever;

Your effort is to lift the soul, . . .

To live it fully, truly . . . never!

'T is not important that one be;

You need, such things to overlook,

That is not written in your book.

A God, pretending not to see . . .

Who turns indulgently away.

Its God must, like the race, grow grey,

With cap and bald-spot painted be.

But such a God is never mine!

Mine is a gale where thine, a breeze.

Unyielding He, where deaf is thine,

Where thine is dull, all-loving He!

And He is young, like Hercules!

No Grandpa-God will do for me!
Like thunder were His stern commands
When in the burning thornbush He,
As o'er a dwarf a giant stands,
Towered over Moses . . . stopped the sun
For Joshua in Gibeon . . .
And countless miracles has done
And countless miracles would do,
If all men were not slack like you!

EJNAR

[With an uncertain smile.]

Shall man, then, be regenerated?

BRAND

That shall he, sir, as I am sure
That to the end was I created,
His ailment and his wound to cure.

EJNAR

Put not the torch out, though it smoke
Before the lantern shows the road!
Strike not the word out that we spoke,
Ere you a better one have showed!

BRAND

'T is nothing new for which I long;
The ever right I will advance.
Nor church nor creed shall be more strong
Through any effort of my hands!
Both saw their earliest morning; hence
It well may chance, as years speed past,
That each in turn will see its last.
Created things come to their ends;

They fall a prey to moth and worm
And must, by law necessitated,
Give way before the unborn form.
But something yet holds out to be,
The spirit which was not created;
Which, when 't was lost, was but set free;
And which, while time was in its spring,
Triumphant, joyous, flourishing,
Like a brave pioneer did force
With manly confidence its way
From flesh up to the spirit's source.
Now do they barter it away
In bits, lest one should spurn the sod
And look to heaven, had he the whole
And knew himself a living soul!
Such is the race's view of God!
But from the scraps of primal spirit,
From these poor remnants we inherit,
Shall a hero rise, so God may know
The noblest of his works below,
His best creation, pristine heir,
His Adam, young and strong and fair!

EJNAR [*Interrupting.*]

Farewell! I think it best that we
Part now and here!

BRAND

Then go ye west,
Myself will north. Two roads there be
To choose from, neither speediest!

EJNAR

Farewell, then!

BRAND

[Turns to begin the descent.]

Light from twilight part!
Remember, that to live's an art!

EJNAR

Go on, then! Turn things topsy-turvy!
I shall be loyal to my God.

BRAND

Good! Paint Him as he doth deserve; He
Will soon be lying 'neath the sod.

*[Exit Brand down the path. Ejnar walks
on in silence, gazing after Brand.]*

AGNES

*[Stands for a moment as if entranced; then
springs up, looks about her in a startled
manner and asks:]*

Did the sun set?

EJNAR

'T was but o'ercast
By vapors, now already passed.
'T is brighter now than ere he left.

AGNES

The wind is cold.

EJNAR

'T was but a blast
Which issued forth from yonder cleft.
Here go we down.

AGNES

The mountain there
Loomed not so gloomily in air,

Looked not so like a prison door
When I regarded it before.

EJNAR

You did not see it for your play
Ere he alarmed you with his bray.
His headlong course let him pursue!
Our merry pastime we'll renew.

AGNES

No, I am weary!

EJNAR

So am I!

Besides, the walking's not so light
As here upon the level height.
But, when the mountain roads are by,
Then, just to show our scorn, we will
Dance fifty times more wildly still
Than otherwise we should have done!
Look, Agnes, see that strip of blue—
On which gleams now the golden sun;
Now doth it smile, now frown on you;
'Tis amber first, then silvery.
That is the great, the open sea
Out there on the horizon's verge!
And can you see yon smoke ascend,
Extending in a level line?
Now watch that moving point emerge
Beyond the headland, 'round the bend!
That is the steamship, yours and mine!
This moment enters it the fjord.
Ere long 't will sail again away

To sea with you and me on board.
The cloud now hides it, deep and grey.
Oh, has it, love, occurred to you
How lovely are the sky and sea?

AGNES

*[Gazes straight ahead as if in deep thought
and says:]*

Yes, yes; but saw you not how he . . .

EJNAR

What, love?

AGNES

While he was speaking, grew!

*[Exit Agnes down the path, followed by
Ejnar.]*

[Curtain.]

*[A scene upon a road along the mountain-
side, with a wild and precipitous gorge to
the right. Above and behind the moun-
tain rise yet more lofty peaks, covered
with snow.]*

BRAND

*[Enters along a path, walking down the
mountain; stops midway of a crag which
juts out over the gorge and, stepping to
the edge, stands gazing down into it.]*

Oh, I know it all once more . . .

Homestead, landing at the shore,
The descent, the spray-washed birch
And the old, brown-painted church,
Alders by the water-fall, . . .

All from childhood I recall!
But methinks it is more grey
Now, and smaller every way.
Yon o'erhanging mountain's brow
Surely bulges further now,
Robs the valley's narrow sky
Of another strip . . . on high,
Friend and comrade of the winds,
Threatens, glowers and confines,
More sun filches every day.
[*He sits down and looks far across the
valley.*]

And the fjord? Could it have been
Then so narrow, poor and mean?
It is gusty; thereaway
Stands a yacht into the bay,
Veering in th' unsteady gale.
Southward 'neath the Hammer's head
Are a landing and a sail.
Back of them are buildings red . . .
'T is the widow's house and farm.
Forth unbidden memories swarm!
On this shore of sand and stone
Dwelt my young boy soul alone!
Such a joyless youth was mine,
From my earliest childhood fated
To a soul to be related
That did unto earth incline!
What great things I had in hand
To accomplish, now but stand
Ghostlike, hidden by a veil.

Courage, spirits, powers fail
And my soul has spent become.
In the neighborhood of home,
Stranger to myself am I . . .
Waken, bound and tamed, to lie,
Samson-like at harlot's knee!

[He gazes into the valley.]

What can this commotion be?
From each countryside and farm
Women, men and children swarm.
Crag behind, down chasms sheer,
In straggling lines they disappear—
Flash in view, then out again
By the church beneath the hill.

[He rises.]

Oh, I know you through and through,
Faint of spirit, dull of brain!
The Lord's prayer as said by you,
Hath not such uplift of will
Nor such emphasis of tone
That it rises to the throne,
Earnest as it should be said,
Past "Give us our daily bread!"
Our land's countersign is this;
This our people's watchword is.
From the context rent apart,
Written into every heart,
'T is the tempest-tossed-and-driven
Remnant of your faith in Heaven!
Out, then, from this foul abyss!

Here the stench of caverns is!
Here shall ne'er a banner wave
On the breezes, free and brave.
[*He turns to go. A stone is cast from above
and rolls along the slope by his side.*]

BRAND [Shouts up.]

Ho, there! Who threw that stone?
[*Enter Gerd, a fifteen-year-old girl, running along the crest of the hill, with a number of stones in her apron.*]

GERD

He flew!

I hit him!

[*Throws again.*]

BRAND

Come, now; stop that play!

GERD

There sits he, disconcerted never,
And swings upon a fallen tree.
[*Throws again and screams.*]

There scuds he now as wild as ever!
Help! With his claws he's rending me!

BRAND

In God's name . . .

GERD

Hush! Who, sir, are you?
Hist now; be still! He flies away!

BRAND

What flies?

GERD

Did you not see the hawk?

BRAND

What? Here? My poor child, how you talk!

GERD

With comb pressed down upon his head
And eyebrows yellowish and red?

BRAND

Where are you going?

GERD

Churchward.

BRAND

So?

Then let us two together go!

GERD

Together? Nay, I go this way!

[She points upward.]

BRAND

[Points into the valley.]

But there's the church.

GERD

[Looks at him with a scornful smile and, pointing also downward in the same direction, asks:]

That, did you say?

BRAND

Of course.

GERD

Nay, that is mean and vile!

BRAND

That mean? And why, pray?

GERD

It is small.

BRAND

Where have you, child, in many a mile
Laid eyes upon a house so tall?

GERD

So tall? So tall? That well I know.
Farewell!

[She starts to go up the mountain.]

BRAND

That road to church you go?
Oh child, you wander; you but haste
Unto the barren, ice-bound waste!

GERD

Come with me, then, and feast your eyes
Upon a church of snow and ice!

BRAND

Of snow and ice? Ah, now I see!
From boyhood's days returns to me
The memory of a dreadful cleft,
Faced toward the valley on the left.
The "ice-church," I believe, 't was called.
Of it sang many a local skald.
A frozen lake made seats and floor;
For roof were snow-drifts, arching o'er

And circling out in lofty halls
Across the widely sundered walls.

GERD

'T is none the less a church, I trow,
That you and others think not so,
And that it seem but ice and rock!

BRAND

Go never there! A sudden blast
Has often caused the glacier break.
A shout . . a shot . . no more 't would take!

GERD

Come on and see a reindeer flock
Which the last avalanche caught fast.
It never came to sight again,
Till freed by springtime's sun and rain.

BRAND

Go never there! 'T is perilous!

GERD

Go never there! 'T is hideous!

BRAND

Farewell, then!

GERD

Nay, come with me, rather!
Glacier and cataract sing mass.
The wind exhorts from icy perch . . .
A pulpit worthy any church . . .
Till you are hot and cold together;
But in, the hawk can never pass.
On Black-cap's summit darts he down,

Clambers and clutches on the rock
And sits there like a weather-cock
Upon my church, the ugly clown!

BRAND

Wild is your spirit, wild your road!
A dulcimer with sound-board split!
"Of evil, evil comes!" 't is writ;
But wicked's quickly changed to good.

GERD

Now doth he, hurtling, o'er us hover!
Now must I hie me under cover!
Farewell! In church I'm safe, alone!
How threateningly doth he fly!

[Screams.]

Come near me not! I'll throw a stone!
Strike thou with claws, with club will I!

[Exit Gerd, fleeing over the mountain.]

BRAND [After a pause.]

She, likewise, was a church's guest.
Below . . . above . . . which do it best?
Which worst and wildest wand'ring roam?
Which furthest grope from peace and home?
The light soul that thinks nought to play
Along the sheerest precipice?
The craven soul that plods its way
Because that way the custom is?
The maddened soul with such wild flight
That evil's lovely in its sight?
To arms on every side, to smite
This triple-league! Arm! On to war!

I see my summons like the light
Of day through shutters, set ajar.
I know my part; these demons three
Will in their utter overthrow
Relieve the groaning world of woe!
Once I have laid this triad low,
Earth's pestilence will lifted be!
Up, spirit, arm! Unsheathe the sword!
Strike for the nobles of the Lord!

[*Exit down the valley. Curtain.*]

ACT II.

[Down along the fjord, with steep cliffs about. The old crumbling church stands on a low hill nearby. A storm is coming up. A number of men, women and children are gathered in groups along the beach and on the hillocks around it. The shrieve sits upon a rock, surrounded by them; a clerk is helping him to distribute grain and provisions. Ejnar and Agnes stand at one side, the center of a group of people. Several boats are lying upon the strand. Brand comes from the hill without being observed.]

A MAN

[Pushes through the crowd.]

Give way, here!

A WOMAN

I come first.

THE MAN

Stand back!

[He pushes through to the shrieve.]

Look here! Look here! Fill up my sack!

THE SHRIEVE

Be patient!

THE MAN

Help me! I must home.

There starving wait me, four . . . nay, five!

THE SHRIEVE

[In a jesting tone.]

Not sure about the number? Come!

THE MAN

One, when I left, was scarce alive.

THE SHRIEVE

Have patience! You are on the list?

No; . . . yes, you are and lucky is 't.

[To the clerk.]

Give number twenty-nine his share!

Now, now, good folks, a moment yet!

Nils Snemyr?

A MAN

Yes.

THE SHRIEVE

Today you get

Only three-fourths as much; you are

One fewer now.

THE MAN

Yes, that is true;

Ragnhild went from us yesterday.

THE SHRIEVE

[Makes a note of it.]

One less, then! Saved is saved alway!

[To the man who has started away.]

But don't go off, now, in a stew
And wed a second time!

THE CLERK [*Chuckling.*]
Ho, ho!

THE SHRIEVE [*Sharply.*]
What laugh you at, sir?

THE CLERK
I did so
Because your honor seemed so gay.

THE SHRIEVE
We have not come here to be jolly;
Yet jests may physic melancholy.

EJNAR
[*With Agnes at his side, steps forth from
the group.*]

I've searched my pockets through and
through,
With purse and hand-bag done the same.
A beggar, I shall go on board
And pawn my cane and watch.

THE SHRIEVE
Yes, you
Most opportunely hither came,
For all too little is my hoard.
It is, as everybody knows,
Far insufficient when lean hands
And famished mouths divide with those
Who nothing have, their scanty store
To save the starving . . .

[He catches sight of Brand and points at him.]

What? One more?
Most welcome! Heard you of the blight?...
The famine, fever, floods and drought?
Then loose your purse-strings if they're
tight!

Your aid's as good as any man's!
Our scant supply will soon give out;
Five fishes in th' impoverished waste
Make nowadays a sorry feast.

BRAND

Ten thousand, in an idol's name
Thrown to you, would no soul reclaim!

THE SHRIEVE

From you not words do I demand!
When empty stomachs cry for bread,
Words, idle words, are stones instead.

EJNAR

You surely heard not of it, Brand,—
How long and sorely suffered these,—
Swept bare by famine, blight, disease.
Unburied lie—

BRAND

'T is plain to see!
The trembling body, thin and weak,—
The sunken eye—the wasted cheek
Are proofs convincing unto me
Of what has here the upper hand.

THE SHRIEVE

And still as hard as flint you stand?

BRAND

*[Walks down among the people and says
with emphasis:]*

If here life smoothly, loosely went
Its usual course, and if, indeed,
'T was but an ordinary need,
I would attend your cry for bread.
Now you must to your hovels crawl;
Straightway comes forth the animal!
When days in languid peace were spent
And at a funeral gait, instead,
It was an easy thing to do
To think God had forgotten you.
But unto you He has been good;
He mingles terror in your blood;
Through mortal peril doth he lead
You, trembling, agonized with pain—
The prize He gave, He takes again—

THE SHRIEVE

He damns us who the starving feed!

BRAND *[Shakes his head.]*

Oh, might my heart's most precious blood
Refresh you, like a healing flood!
Its tide should from the fountain fly
Till all mine arteries were dry!
But now to aid you were a sin!
Lo, God would lift you from the mire,
A living race though weak and thin . . .

From suffering strength and power acquire,
Your dull eyes get the falcon's sight,
Straight forward like an arrow's flight . . .
Your wills, awakening to life,
Behold the triumph through the strife!
But, if want breeds not spirits brave,
'T is not worth while the pack to save!

A WOMAN

[*Pointing to Brand.*]

A tempest rages on the fjord,
As if 't were summoned at his word!

ANOTHER

He tempts God! Mark ye what I say!

BRAND

Your God does nothing wonderful!

THE WOMAN

Behold the tempest!

SEVERAL IN CHORUS

Drive away,

With stones and knives, the hardened soul!

[*The mob surrounds Brand with menacing looks and gestures. The shrieve steps between them. A woman, wild and haggard, comes running over the hill.*]

THE WOMAN

[*Shouts to the crowd.*]

Help, help! For Christ's sake, help me!

THE SHRIEVE

How?

THE WOMAN

No ordinary help I call;
'T is the most dreadful thing of all . . .
Life's direst need is on us now!

THE SHRIEVE

What is it?

THE WOMAN

Where's the priest?

THE SHRIEVE

There's none.

THE WOMAN

God save me!

BRAND [*Draws near.*]

Yet there may be one—

THE WOMAN

[*Seizes him by the arm.*]

Do not a single moment wait;
One moment lost might bring you late!

BRAND

Speak, then!

THE WOMAN

Across the fjord . . .

BRAND

Yes?

THE WOMAN

Oh,

Our children starving . . . not a crust
In all the larder . . . God is just!
Tell me, he is not damned! . . . no, no!

BRAND

Speak on!

THE WOMAN

My breasts had both run dry;
Man helped us not, nor the Most High.
The youngest, dying, pinched and blue
Drove him to frenzy . . . her he slew!

BRAND

He slew . . . ?

THE CROWD [*In horror.*]
His child!

THE WOMAN

The moment he
Perceived the deed's enormity,
Raged like a torrent his remorse;
He set upon himself with force.
Haste, priest, his soul to fortify,
Despite the waves and lowering sky!
He cannot live and dare not die.
The body in his arms, he lies
And madly on the devil cries!

BRAND

Yes, here is need!

EJNAR

Can such things be?

THE SHRIEVE

That district is not under me.

BRAND

[*Brusquely to the crowd.*]

Unmoor a boat and take me there!

A MAN

In such a tempest? None would dare.

THE SHRIEVE

A path leads 'round the fjord. . .

THE WOMAN

No, no!

That way one can no longer go.

I came along it, but a flood

Tore out the bridges as I stood.

BRAND

Unmoor a boat!

A MAN

We cannot now;

The waves are dashing on the shore!

ANOTHER MAN

Look yonder! From the mountain's brow

A furious whirlwind fell and broke,

Enveloping the fjord in smoke!

A THIRD

In such a fearful din and roar,

The dean an end to mass would make!

BRAND

A sinner, soon to meet his fate,

For wind and weather cannot wait.

[He steps down into a boat and loosens the sail.]

You risk your boat, sir?

THE OWNER

Yes; but stay!

BRAND

Come, whoso dares his life to stake!

ONE MAN

I am not going.

ANOTHER

Nor will I!

SEVERAL

To death it is the certain way!

BRAND

Your God helps none across the fjord,
But bear in mind: Mine is on board!

THE WOMAN

[Wringing her hands.]

Oh, haste! Unshriven he will die!

BRAND

[Shouts from the boat.]

One man will do, to tend the sail
And water from the hull to bail.
Come, one of you who lately gave!
Give now—give even to the grave!

SEVERAL

[Shrinking from him.]

Demand not such!

ONE MAN

[In a threatening manner.]

Come out, I say!
It is too much with God to play!

SEVERAL

Wild howls the storm!

OTHERS

The rope gives way!

BRAND

*[Holds the boat by means of the boat-hook
and calls to the strange woman:]*

Then come yourself, without delay!

THE WOMAN

[Draws back from him.]

I? Here, where no one—?

BRAND

Let them stay!

THE WOMAN

I cannot.

BRAND

Cannot?

THE WOMAN

Bear in mind

The little ones I left behind!

BRAND

[Laughs.]

Thin is the ground you build upon!

AGNES

*[Suddenly turns with glowing cheeks to
Ejnar, lays her hand upon his arm and
says:]*

Did you not hear it?

EJNAR

He is brave!

AGNES

God bless you! You your duty know!

[She cries to Brand.]

Behold, here by my side is one
Well worthy to defy the wave
With you, a suffering soul to save!

BRAND

Make haste, then!

EJNAR

I?

AGNES

I give you! Go!

My soul, which was cast down before
By bitter doubts, looks up once more!

EJNAR

Ere you I met, without a fear
I should have volunteered to brave
With him the frowning sky and wave . . .

AGNES

[Trembling.]

But now . . . ?

EJNAR

My life is young and dear.

I cannot now.

AGNES

[Draws away from him.]

What have you said?

EJNAR

I dare not now.

AGNES

[*Cries out.*]

Then there is laid

By storm and flood eternally

Between us two a world-wide sea!

[*To Brand.*]

I will go with you!

BRAND

So? Then come!

THE WOMAN

[*Horror-stricken as Agnes springs on board.*]

Help! Jesus! . . .

EJNAR

[*In a bewildered manner puts out his hand
to stop her.*]

Agnes!

THE WHOLE CROWD

[*Rushes up.*]

Stop! Turn back!

BRAND

Where is the house?

THE WOMAN [*Points to it.*]

That is our home . . .

There on the cape behind the black,

Bold promontory . . .

[*The boat puts off from land.*]

EJNAR

[*Shouts after them.*]

Think of mother!

Think of your sister and your brother!
Risk not your life!

AGNES

On board are three!

*[The boat puts off. The people gather on
the hillocks and watch its progress with
eager and excited interest.]*

A MAN

He clears the headland.

A SECOND

No!

THE FIRST

Yes! See,
It lies behind him in the lee!

THE SECOND

That furious blast fell on them fair!

THE SHRIEVE

Look! Look! It carried off his hat!

A WOMAN

As black as ravens' wings in air
Beats wildly o'er him his wet hair!

THE FIRST MAN

All's boiling, fuming!

EJNAR

What was that?
The scream which pierced the tempest
through?

A WOMAN

The screech unearthly that you heard,
Was from the mountain.

ANOTHER [*Points up.*]

There stands Gerd!
And jeers and howls at what they do.

THE FIRST WOMAN

She winds a blast on her buckhorn
And pitches stones like wizard-corn!

THE SECOND WOMAN

She waves the horn, now, as a wand
And screeches through her hollow hand!

A MAN

You ugly imp, howl all you can!
Good spirits watch and shield that man!

ANOTHER

In far worse storms, with him on board,
Next time I'll venture on the fjord
Without a tremor.

THE FIRST MAN

What was he?

EJNAR

He is a priest.

THE SECOND MAN

Whate'er he be,
He is a man, 't is plain to see!
In him is courage, daring, might!

THE FIRST MAN

Just such a priest for us were right!

MANY VOICES

Yes, for us such a priest were right!
[*They scatter over the hillocks.*]

THE SHRIEVE

[*Collects his books and papers.*]
Improper 't is on any grounds,
Strange missions thus to undertake—
Take hold and set one's life at stake
Without good reason so to do!
I always do my duty, too,
But keep within official bounds.

[*Exit the shrieve. Curtain.*]

[*Outside a hut by the promontory. It is late in the afternoon. The fjord is smooth and quiet. Agnes is sitting down by the beach. In a few moments Brand comes out of the door of the hut.*]

BRAND

That was death! The fright and dread
Ebb'd away as life was closing;
Now peace rests upon his head,—
Every lineament reposing!
Can mere trickery betray
Such black horror into day?
He perceived the surface, wholly,
Of his awful crime . . . that, solely,
Which can be put into words . . .
What is concrete, will him sever
From his fellows, branded ever
As his own child's murderer . . .

Just the wrong he did to her!
While the two that, like two birds,
Huddled close and quiet near her,
Stare with wide eyes brimmed with terror..
Crouched there in the chimney-nook . . .
Only look and look and look . . .
Know not in good sooth at what . . .
They whose souls received a spot
That will never wear away
In time's turmoil, toil and sweat,
Even when they're bowed and grey;
They whose life-streams shall be set
From this awful memory; they
Who will grow into the light
From the horror of this night,
Shuddering at this dreadful crime;
Who can never in all time
Burn this cancer from their thought . . .
'T was not granted him to feel:
"These are they who have to deal
With the awful consequence
Of the monstrous deed I wrought!"
And from them perchance will flow
Generations of violence.
Why? Responds the pit below:
They're the children of their sire!
What may smooth away in quiet;
What be calmed by mildness . . . by it
Many a burnt child's shunned the fire . . .
Where responsibility
Starts for one's heredity . . . ?

What a judge and what a court
Will be that of last resort!
Where each soul a culprit is,
Where get jurors—witnesses?
Who will venture to present
His vile passport document?
Will the debtor serve to free:
“Father passed the debt to me”?
Riddle deep and dark as hell!
No one can your meaning tell.
But along the sheer abyss
Dances on the witless crowd.
Souls should tremble, cry aloud:
But of all scarce one sees this,
*What great obligations grow
From the fact: “I live.”*

*[Several of the men who were in the
crowd come from behind the hut and
draw near.]*

ONE MAN

And so
We meet each other once again.

BRAND

He has no need for your assistance.

THE MAN

No, he himself has been relieved;
But in yon chamber three remain.

BRAND

And so?

THE MAN

And so for their subsistence
Out of the little we received
A scanty portion have we brought . . .

BRAND

Though all except your lives you gave,
Remember, you have given nought!

THE MAN

Had he who now lies dead, today
Been in great peril on the wave
And from his bark called me to save,
I should have risked my own existence.

BRAND

But doth the soul's need nothing weigh?

THE MAN

Remember that in sterile soil
Our people are condemned to toil!

BRAND

Then turn forevermore your eyes
Away from the refulgent light
Which shines above yon mountain's brow!
Let them not once from dull earth rise!
But be not double-faced as now,
With left eye turned to heaven, right
Toward earth, while 'neath a yoke you groan
Which you put on your necks alone!

THE MAN

I had expected when you spoke
The counsel: Cast away the yoke!

BRAND

Yes, if you can!

THE MAN

That power you hold.

BRAND

But do I?

THE MAN

Yes; the others told
Distinctly where the right way led;
But you have traveled it, instead!

BRAND

You mean . . . ?

THE MAN

Not all the words men speak
Have power like unto one brave deed.
You in the church's name we seek;
We see that such a priest we need.

BRAND

[*Perturbed.*]

What ask ye of me?

THE MAN

Be our priest!

BRAND

I? Here?

THE MAN

Yes, I suppose you know,
The parish is without one.

BRAND

Oh,

Now I remember—

THE MAN

Years ago

This parish was no poor affair;
But nowadays 't is of the least.
When failed our harvests, froze the wheat,
When fell the plague on man and beast,
When poverty stripped all men bare,
When every spirit had become
Through want, despair and suffering numb,
When there was dearth of bread and meat,
Then were we left without a priest.

BRAND

Ask what you will, save that of me!
A higher destiny is mine.
I need life's great activity,
The world to look upon and hear.
Why should I idly tarry here?
Where cold, impassive cliffs confine,
Man's voice no resonance possesses!

THE MAN

Words spoken openly and strong,
Where hills respond, re-echo long!

BRAND

Who would betake him to recesses
While plains, resplendent in the light
Of the most glorious sun, invite?
Who would so witless be as plow
The rough, unfruitful mountain's brow
When on all sides are to be found
Great fields of cultivated ground?

And who plants seedlings for the fruit
With young trees standing in plain sight?
And who would drudge, a stagnant brute,
With spirit soaring toward the light?

THE MAN

[*Shakes his head.*]

Your deed spoke volumes; I have heard
The things which you have sought to say
And comprehended—not a word!

BRAND

Inquire no more! Away, away!

[*He starts to go.*]

THE MAN [*Confronts him.*]

The mission you will not eschew,
This which you hunger so to do,
Is it not precious to you?

BRAND

Yea!

It is my very life!

THE MAN

Then stay!

[*With emphasis.*]

Though all except your life you brought,
Remember, you have given nought!

BRAND

One thing man cannot give, is his;
His sacred, inmost self it is.
He dares not bind it, dares not chain,

Dares not its summer-tide restrain;
Its stubborn way it will pursue
Untrammelled to the ocean blue.

THE MAN

Though sunk in bog, and fen it be,
As dew at last it finds the sea.

BRAND

[Regards the man closely.]

Who put such words upon your lips?

THE MAN

Yourself, when I beheld your deed,—
When to the peril of great ships
The tempest raged, the waves beat high
And you in scorn of gale and wave
Set forth in a mere shell to save,
And staked your life upon a die
To ease a sinful soul in need.
Then something ran through every mind,
Now cold, now warm, like sun and wind.
It thrilled our spirits like a spell;
It tingled like a muffled bell; . . .

[He lowers his voice.]

To morrow, likely, 't is forgot.
We'll let the flag of promise fall
Which you have lifted over all!

BRAND

There is no call where strength is not.

[Sternly.]

If what you ought, you cannot be,

Be then in earnest what you may,—
Without let, unreservedly,
In all its fullness men of clay!

THE MAN

[*Gazes mournfully upon him for a moment.*]

Woe, you who darken when you go!

To us who saw, a moment, woe!

[*Exit the man; the others follow him out,
silently.*]

BRAND

[*Stands for a long time looking after them.*]

Each aloof, with bowed heads they

Silent wend their homeward way.

Sullen sadness fills each mind;

Drags each foot like lead, along;

Each in gloomy, hopeless guise

Walks as menaced by a thong,

Like the father of mankind

Driven forth from paradise;—

Walks as he, with brow guilt-stained,

Views as he, the awful pit;

Gazes hopelessly in it;

Adam-like his knowledge gained;

Adam-like his blindness lost;

The soul's Rubicon has crossed.

Thought I to regenerate

Man and make him truly great?

There he is, crime's counterfeit,

Not God's as He purposed it.

Out! Seek broader fields, to fight!

There's not room here for a knight!

*[He starts to go but stops when he chances
to observe Agnes, sitting down by the
beach.]*

Lo, she sits, yet listening, there
As to music in the air!
Listening in the boat she stood
As it split the seething flood;
Listening, to the bench she clung;
Listening, she the white foam flung
From her countenance so fair!
'T is as if by some device
She could listen with her eyes!

[Approaches her.]

Girl, is it the fjord's course, curled,
That you follow with your sight?

AGNES

[Without turning her head.]

Not the fjord, nor yet the world!
Both are out of vision, quite!
'T is a greater world I view,
Limned on th' empyrean blue!
Mighty streams flow to the sea;
Shoots the sun through clouds his ray;
Pulsing sheets of flame I see
Over the veiled mountains play.
'T is a desert unsurveyed.
Palms gigantic stand afar,
Swaying in the scorching wind.
Back from them deep shadows are.

Signs of life are none to find.
It is like an earth new-made.
I hear voices murmuring
Like the song birds in the spring,
Wooing, saying: "Count the cost!
It is to be saved or lost.
Do the things that I command;
Forth and people thou this land!"

BRAND

[*Eagerly.*]

Say what more you see!

AGNES

Herein

I can feel the forces glow,
Fountains gush and spring-tides flow;
I can see the dawn begin.
The heart hath its fields unfurled,
Stands before me like a world.
Voices cry on every hand:
"Forth and people thou this land!"
All the thoughts that are to seethe—
All—whatever is to be—
Waken, whisper, move and breathe
As impatient for their birth
And to people your new earth.
And I rather feel than see
Christ, exalted you above,—
Feel that He is looking on,
Full of pity and of love,
Mild and radiant as dawn,
Sad, though, from the cross and death.

And again the spirit saith:
"Do thou what thou wilt! The cost?
This, thou hast thyself created!
It is to be saved or lost.
To thy work, thou consecrated!"

BRAND

Aye, within! There have you right!
Thither bears the pathway clear!
Man's own bosom is the sphere,
Newly-born, where in God's sight
The will's vulture shall be slain,
Adam shall be born again!
Let the mad world whirl along
In its serfdom, dance and song!
It shall matter not to me!
Meet we, though, in enmity
And to crush my work 't is like,
Then, by heaven, I will strike!
For, of all the earth's expanse,
Ask I but a place to stand,
But the privilege to be
The full self that is in me!
Nothing more do I demand,
Than is, likewise, every man's!
[*Muses for a time in silence; then speaks
on.*]

Be myself! But how break free
From my own heredity?

[*Stops and gazes ahead.*]

Who is she who seems to grope,

Crawling, hobbling up the slope?
Crookèd, bow-necked, lank and shrunken?
Breathless stops she, with a stumble,
Props herself lest she should tumble,
Like one staggering homeward drunken;
Plunges with her fingers thin,
With wild trepidation, deep
In her pockets as therein
Did she some prized treasure keep?
'Round her withered skeleton
Flops her gown about her knees
Like drawn skin, all feathery.
Hooked her hands are, tong-like; she's
Like an eagle, hanging on
An oft-looted granary.

[In a sudden spasm of agony.]

What dim memory of the past
Is this, borne on icy blast,
Which pours o'er this woman, frost
But upon my heart the most?
God have mercy! 'T is my mother!

HIS MOTHER

*[Scrambles up the slope, stops when but
half in sight, shades her eyes with her
hand and looks about.]*

Here they said he was.

[Approaches.]

Oh, bother
The sunlight; it near blinds me! Son,
Can it be you?

BRAND

Yes.

HIS MOTHER

Oh, that light!

It fairly burns into my sight.

One cannot tell a priest from peasant.

BRAND

At home I never saw the sun

From autumn till the cuckoo crew.

HIS MOTHER

[With a smile of approval.]

No, there indeed, 't is very pleasant!

One freezes up there every fall

Like icicles at a water-fall.

There brave enough is one to do

Whatever he desires of sin,

Yet rests secure in the belief,

He will be saved in spite of all.

BRAND

Farewell! Farewell! My stay is brief!

HIS MOTHER

Yes, you have ever hasty been.

In youth you burned to get away—

BRAND

You did not counsel me to stay!

HIS MOTHER

I my maternal claim released

To educate you for a priest.

[She scrutinizes him more closely.]

Oho, but you are big and tall—
A king! But hearken, boy, to me:
Guard well your life!

BRAND

And is that all?

HIS MOTHER

Why, yes; what else, son, could there be?

BRAND

I mean, the counsel that you gave, . . .
Is that all of it?

HIS MOTHER

If you see

Aught else, do as you will! For me,
The life that I have given, save!

[*Angrily.*]

I have been told what you have done.
It harrowed up my soul with fright.
To sea today! You might have spilt
What you should cherish for my sake.
Of all the race you are the last;
You are my flesh and blood, my son.
As roof-board do you finish quite
The house which I with toil have built.
Be faithful! Never me forsake!
Guard well your life! Be strong, hold fast!
The duty of an heir's to live
And I . . . someday . . . at last . . . will give . . .

BRAND

So 't was for that you sought for me,
With bulging pockets . . .

[80]

HIS MOTHER

Back! Remain
Where you are standing! Can it be
You're crazy? Back! I'll use my cane!

[With less excitement.]

What did you mean? Stand there and hear!
I'm growing older year by year,
And soon or late I needs must die.
Then you will own what now own I.
It lies there, counted, measured, weighed.
It is not here. I am afraid
To bear it with me when I come
So far as this. It lies at home . . .
Not very much, of course; but he
Who gets it, will no beggar be.
Stand where you are! Come near me not!
I pledge you that I will not try
To hide or bury when I die
A stiver in an unknown spot
Nor aught conceal beneath a stone,
Under the floor or in the wall.
You shall, my son, receive it all . . .
The fortune shall be yours alone.

BRAND

On what conditions?

HIS MOTHER

But the one:
That with your life you will not play
Nor in rash ventures throw away . . .
The race continue, son by son.

Rewards I ask not, save: "Let none
Be dissipated! None divide!
No portion from the total sever!"
Increase or not, I'm satisfied;
But keep it, keep it safely, ever!

BRAND

[After a moment's pause.]

One thing there is we must decide.
You from my boyhood I defied.
You were no mother, I no son
Till you were grey and I was grown.

HIS MOTHER

I ask not kindness at your hand.
Be what you will, I can withstand.
Hard words cannot my armor pierce.
Be rough, be cold as ice, be fierce!
But keep 'intact th' inheritance
Which I deliver to your hands. . .
Though idle, unincreased it be,
If 't is but in the family!

BRAND

[Steps a pace nearer.]

And if, instead, my mood it pleases
To scatter it unto the breezes . . . ?

HIS MOTHER

[Shrinks from him.]

To scatter what through years of care
Has bowed my body, bleached my hair?

BRAND

[*Nods unconcernedly.*]

Yes; scatter!

HIS MOTHER

Scatter? If you do,
My soul before the winds you strew.

BRAND

But if I do so, notwithstanding?
If by your bed some night I stand,
Where also the death-lamp is standing,
When you, with prayer-book in your hand,
Are slumbering in death's first night;—
If there I rummage, fumble, feel,
Forth treasure after treasure steal—
If I take up the lamp and light—?

HIS MOTHER

[*Approaches him, bewildered.*]

Whence have you that conception, pray?

BRAND

Whence came it? Shall I tell you?

HIS MOTHER

Yea!

BRAND

From an experience when a boy;
That memory time cannot destroy.
It scars, disfigures and disgraces
The soul, as harelips do men's faces.
One autumn evening, father dead
And you sick unto death in bed,
I tiptoed in to where he lay,

Ghastly beneath the candle's ray.
I stood there, staring from a nook,
And saw he held a prayer-book.
His trance surprised me most of all
And how his wrist had grown so small.
I recognized there very well
Fresh-ironed linen's pungent smell.
Then heard I footsteps on the stair;
A woman entered; unaware
That I was present, sought the bed.
She rummaged, searched the body o'er.
First did she move the dead man's head . . .
Drew forth a bundle . . . two . . . three . . .
four!
She counted . . . whispered: "More! . . .
More! . . . More!"
She dug one package out from under
The pillow, corded, knotted, bound.
With eager hands she ripped and tore
And with her teeth rent this asunder.
She searched again and more she found.
She counted . . . muttered: "More! . . .
More! . . . More!"
She wept, she prayed, she spluttered, swore:
And, like a hound, she seemed to trace
By smell each secret hiding-place.
And, when she found one, instantly
She fell upon it in the way
The falcon dashes on his prey,
In a mad paroxysm of glee.
Each hiding-place was drained at last

And with her treasure she slunk past,
With greed unsated left the room
Like one sent forth to meet his doom.
The treasures in a cloth she laid
And stood there, sighing: "That was all!"

HIS MOTHER

Fierce was my lust, my fortune small:
And dearly for it have I paid.

BRAND

You knew not that 't was dearer still:
It served my filial love to kill.

HIS MOTHER

Enough! It is a custom old
To give up tenderness for gold.
At first a higher price I paid.
I wrecked my life, I am afraid.
I something gave which now is dead.
It seems unto my failing sight
To have alluring radiance shed,
Like freedom, loveliness and light,
Combining folly and delight.
I gave one thing, all else above,
Which through long years I've sought to
smother
And now scarce feel. Men call it "love."
Well I recall that sacrifice
And well my aged sire's advice:
"Forget the pauper! Take the other!"
Consider not his withered frame!
The fellow has a level head;

He 'll double your round dot!" he said.
I took him—but, unto my shame,
He failed to yield the promised gain.
But I have slaved and saved since then
And now but little doth remain
To fill the measure up again.

BRAND

Are you aware, so near your grave,
Your soul you in the bargain gave?

HIS MOTHER

That so I am, the clearest proof
Is that I had you be a priest.
When death is nigh, in my behoof
You act to have my soul released
To pay for your inheritance.
I own both movables and lands
And you the power to console,
To shrive and justify my soul.

BRAND

Although so worldly-cunning, you
Are much mistaken when you view
In home's unfaithful mirror, me!
Yet men there are, in each direction,
With just such filial affection.
You in your son a steward see
For cast-off clothes heredity
Hands to him from his ancestry;
'T is only now and then a gleam
Of things eternal stirs your dream.
You fumble for it and believe
Its essence that you have purloined

When you your precious property
And family together weave,
And thus death unto life have joined,
Securing thus eternity
In century on century
Of undisturbed succession . . .

HIS MOTHER

What
I have in mind, son, question not!
Accept the heritage you get
When it is yours . . .

BRAND

And debt?

HIS MOTHER

What debt?

There is none.

BRAND

Very likely; still
If debts there be, I must fulfill
The obligations, one and all.
A son should see that every call
Beside his mother's grave is met.
When I, as nearest kinsman, get
Your house, though swept of all things were
it,
Yet would I all your debts inherit.

HIS MOTHER

No law enjoins it.

BRAND

No; not such

As men have made! But by God's touch
In every dutiful son's breast
Another law has been impressed.
That mandate must be strictly kept.
Awaken, you who blindly slept!
God's temple you have brought to scorn.
Your soul, the talent He has loaned,
You have cast out, defiled, disowned.
The image in which you were born,
You have in slimy mudholes dipped;
The soul which once was wingèd, clipped
And draggled 'mid the rabble. See?
This is your debt. Where will you flee
When God requires his own again?

HIS MOTHER [*In dread.*]

Where flee?

BRAND

Fear nothing! For your child
Will take your burden on him then.
God's image which you have defiled,
In him the will's pure flood shall lave
Until it rise regenerated.
With simple trust approach your grave!
My mother shall not lie there, weighted
With debts she cannot hope to pay.
Your son will pay them.

HIS MOTHER

Debt and crime.

BRAND

Your debt! That only! Mark! I say
Your son will clear your soul of debt;

You for your wrong must answer yet.
The sum of manhood that's worn out
In writhing to and fro about
In earthly bondage, every dime,
May by another be replaced.
The wrong is, that there should be waste.
For that, one must repent . . . or die.

HIS MOTHER

[*Greatly perturbed.*]

I certainly had better now
Unto the sheltering darkness hie,
Beneath the glacier's shelving brow;
For poisonous ideas grow
In this unwholesome sunlight's glow.
The fumes intoxicate me quite.

BRAND

Seek, then, the darkness! I am nigh
And, when you're drawn toward heaven's
light
And when you need me, bye and bye,
Send for me; I will surely come.

HIS MOTHER

Yes; you! In consolation dumb
But thunderous in condemnation!

BRAND

Nay! Warm and loving, as your child,
And, as your priest, benign and mild.
I will with sacred incantation
Allay the torment in your blood.

HIS MOTHER

That swear you, son, by all that's good?

BRAND

When your repentant soul shall cry
For mercy, I will speed to save!

[*Approaches her.*]

Conditions, though, like you, make I.
All that with earth connects you still,
You must cast off of your free will
And naked pass into your grave.

HIS MOTHER

[*Gesticulating wildly.*]

Bid heat be parted from the fire!
From frost, snow! Dampness from the sea!

BRAND

Cast out the child, midway the bay,
And God to bless your action pray!

HIS MOTHER

Some other penance put on me . . .
Aught other . . . hunger . . . thirst require . . .
But not this greatest sacrifice!

BRAND

Your offering too little is,
If not the greatest; aught less great
Will not God's sentence moderate.

HIS MOTHER

I will give wealth in charity.

BRAND

Give all?

HIS MOTHER

Will not a great deal do?

BRAND

For you there is no remedy,
Until resigning all things, you
Like Job upon his ash-heap lie
And purged of all earth's longings die.

HIS MOTHER

[Wringing her hands.]

My life misspent; repudiated
My spirit; and my property
So soon to be thus dissipated!
Then home and to my bosom strain
My treasures while they're left to me!
My riches, offspring of my pain!
For you I rent my heart in twain!
Now home and like a mother weep
Who guards her ailing infant's sleep.
Why was my soul, if worldly lust
Be spirit's death, born into dust?
Stay near me, priest! I can't forecast
What, facing death, my soul may choose.
If all, while living, I must lose,
I will hold to it till the last.

[Exit the mother.]

BRAND

[Gazes after her as she departs.]

Yes, your son will near you stay,
Wait your summons on the day
When, repentant, you resign

All earth's dross; and take in mine
Your void hand when given.

[*Goes across to Agnes.*]

Forlorn

Evening is, unlike the morn.
Then was I arrayed for war,
Then heard battle-hymns afar,
Longed God's sword of wrath to wield.
Crush out falsehoods, dragons slay,
Cover all men with my shield.

AGNES

[*Turns as he is speaking and now looks
with beaming countenance into his.*]

Matched with evening, morn was grey.
Then I did but trifle, lie—
Then was I to capture fain
What to lose was my true gain.

BRAND

Glorious visions, visions fair
Swam like wild swans through the air.
And they bore my soul on high
Whence did my glad eyes behold
What should be my course, unrolled.
Then the thralldom of the age
Called in thunder-tones to me:
"Free man from this vassalage!"
A procession's dignity,
Incense, banners, hymns, applause,
Shouts, glad cries of victory,
A freed people's jubilee
Were about me and my cause!

It was heavenly to see,
But mere poetry it was . . .
Only glimmering on the height,
Half in darkness, half in light!
Now confronts me evening dun;
The last rays of the spent sun
Fast are vanishing from sight;
Now the long, dark, dreary night
Faces me ere break of day.
Here, between the steep and bay . . .
Egress to the world closed tight,
But a strip of heaven in sight!
Still though humble be my toil,
I am on my native soil!
Now the Sabbath poem's sung.
Off from Pegasus be flung
Girth and saddle! I my part
See and hail with all my heart.
Higher is it, than to fight
With stern weapons for the right,
Daily toil and common duty
To invest with Sabbath beauty!

AGNES

What of Him who was to fall?

BRAND

Fall He shall, as certainly,
But aloof and secretly,
Not beknown of one and all!
For I had the wrong idea
Of the real panacea
To redeem mankind. I found

That no vaunting deed of might
 Lifts men up and sets them right.
 To call powers from their founts
 Healeth not the spirit's wound.
 'T is the will alone that counts,
 That emancipates or slays . . .
 In all matters, in all ways . . .
 Things of import great or slight!
*[Turns toward the parish on which the
 shades of evening are beginning to fall.]*
 Come, then, ye who listless wander
 In the narrow vale, cliff-bound,
 Of my native parish yonder!
 We'll, this pit to purify,
 Shoulder unto shoulder, try,
 Till each rood be hallowed ground;
 Falsehood stun, kill compromise,
 Bid the will's young lion rise!
 Hands on plows as on the sword
 Do with manfulness accord.
 'T is to hold the tablet white
 Whereupon the Lord may write!
[He turns to go. Egnar confronts him.]

EJNAR

Robber, stay! Unto my hands
 Restore your booty!

BRAND

There she stands!

EJNAR *[To Agnes.]*

Choose between the sunlit height
 And this noisome vale of night!

AGNES

Choice, there's none for me to make!

EJNAR

Agnes, do not spurn me! Hear!
Mind the proverb and beware!
"Light to lift but hard to bear!"

AGNES

Go! God speed you, tempter fair!
I will bear until it break!

EJNAR

Think of them whom you hold dear!

AGNES

Give my love to sister, brother,
To my father and my mother!
What comes to me I will write.

EJNAR

Out upon the sea, the white
Sails are fleeing from the strand.
Lofty, pearl-besprinkled prows . . .
Longings over dreamy brows . . .
Part the waves in fervent quest
Of the long-sought, promised land.

AGNES

Sail thou east or sail thou west,
Think of me as one who died!

EJNAR

Then, as sister, come with me!

AGNES

[Shakes her head.]

Severs us a world-wide sea!

EJNAR

Home, then, to your mother's side!

AGNES *[In a low tone.]*

Not from brother, teacher, friend!

BRAND

[Draws a little nearer.]

Take good heed what you intend!

Shut between the mountains tall,

Crag-canopied as with a pall,

Plunged into a cavern deep,

Prisoned in a gloomy cleft,

What is of my lifetime left

Will like sad October creep.

AGNES

Night no longer brings me dread,

Stars will pierce the clouds o'erhead.

BRAND

Bear in mind that I will call,

Unappeased, for "nought or all."

Should you fall upon the way,

All your life were thrown away.

In need's hour no hesitation,

No weak yielding to temptation!

And if strength and life gave way,

Willingly without a cry,

You must be prepared to die.

EJNAR

Haste to flee this madman's play!
Leave this stern, relentless man!
Live the life you know you can!

BRAND

Choose! The parting of the way
Faces you!

EJNAR

Choose peace or strife!
Choosing whether here to stay
Or with me is night or morn,
Slain delight or joy reborn—
Aye, 't is choosing death or life!

AGNES

[Rises and says with deliberation.]

Into the night! Through death with scorn-
ing!

Beyond it dawns the glorious morning!

[Exit Agnes with Brand. Ejnar stands for a moment, gazing after her, as if dazed, bows his head and goes down toward the fjord again. Curtain.]

ACT III.

[Three years later. In a little garden at the parsonage. A lofty, precipitous mountain looms behind it and a stone wall encloses it. Narrow and land-locked, the fjord lies in the background. A door leads from the house into the garden. It is in the afternoon. Brand is standing on the steps outside the house. Agnes sits on one of the steps below him.]

AGNES

My husband, why is it once more
Your eyes sweep anxiously the fjord . . . ?

BRAND

I wait for word.

AGNES

You are distraught.

BRAND

From mother I await a call.
That summons, never to me brought,
I have awaited, now in all,
Three years without impatience and
Today am given to understand
That her last hour is near at hand.

AGNES

[*Gently and tenderly.*]

Without a call, Brand, you should go!

BRAND

If penitence wring not her breast,
No words of comfort do I know
To soothe her fevered soul to rest.

AGNES

She is your mother.

BRAND

It were sin
To raise up idols in my kin.

AGNES

Brand, you are hard!

BRAND

To you?

AGNES

Oh, no!

BRAND

Yet for you did I prophesy
A thorny road.

AGNES

It came not true.
That promise was not kept by you.

BRAND

It was. Here winds sweep fiercely by;
Here fade the roses from your cheek:
And here your soul is chilled and weak.
And nothing prospers near our house;
It stands girt 'round by waste and browse.

AGNES

For that we but the safer are!
Yon glacier has built out so far
That, when, what time the new leaves sprout,
It bursts its moorings and goes out,
The avalanche will o'er us leap . . .
The parsonage stand free from harm
As if retired in cavern deep
O'er which the arching waters sweep.

BRAND

The sunlight never reaches here.

AGNES

Its radiance dances, soft and warm,
On Black-top's shoulder very near.

BRAND

Only three weeks on summer-days,
But never reaches to his base.

AGNES

[*Looks at him closely, rises and says:*]
Brand, that is one thing frightens you!

BRAND

You, rather!

AGNES

You!

BRAND

You have a dread,
A secret . . .

AGNES

Brand, you dread it, too!

[100]

BRAND

As if you stood upon the brim
Of a sheer chasm, reels your head.
Speak out!

AGNES

I shudder now and then . . .

BRAND

Shudder? For whom?

AGNES

For Alf!

BRAND

For him?

AGNES

And so have you!

BRAND

At times. But nay,
God will not take our boy away!
The Lord is good! Time will be, when
Alf shall be mighty among men!
Where is he?

AGNES

He is sleeping.

BRAND

[*Peers in at the door.*]

See!

Of pain or illness dreams not he.
His little hand is plump and round.

AGNES

But pale!

[101]

BRAND

That hue will soon be gone!

AGNES

How sweetly, softly sleeps he on!

BRAND

God bless thee! Be thy slumber sound!

[Closes the door.]

With him and you, about my head
And mission, light and peace are shed.
Things difficult to bear and do
Lose all their terrors here with you.
With you my courage ne'er gives way
And strength flows from his baby-play.
As martyrdom, I took this call;
But see, how strangely altered all!
How fortune, following, has pressed
Close after me, upon my quest!

AGNES

Yes, Brand, but no more than it ought.
Oh, you have struggled, suffered, fought!
Withstood the crushing blows of fate
And labored early, labored late!
I know that secretly at night
Great drops of anguished blood you wept!

BRAND

But, grant it, all to me seemed light!
With you into my bosom swept
Affection, like a morning lit
By the spring sun from southern zone.
That feeling I had never known;

My parents never kindled it.
They quenched the feeble sparks and few
That sometimes from the ashes flew.
It was as if the latent hoard
Of tenderness in my heart stored
Had been conserved to crown with joy
And blessedness my wife and boy.

AGNES

Not for us only, but for all
Who of our household form a part.
At the rich table of your heart
Each son of sorrow, every brother
Who in distress sends forth a call,
Each plaining child or wailing mother
For consolation finds a place.

BRAND

But through you two! For you have riven
Through love another path to heaven.
No soul can humankind embrace
In love, if first he love not one.
I should have longed without reward
Until my heart was hard as stone . . .

AGNES

And yet your very love is hard,
Whom you are fain to stroke, you strike!

BRAND

What, you?

AGNES

Deal with me as you like!
The burden which you bade me bear

Has proven easy, light as air;
But many spirits from you fall
At the requirement: "Nought or all!"

BRAND

What "love" the world's dull minions call,
I do not hanker for or know.
God's love I cherish, but I spurn
The view that it is doting play.
As death's dark horrors it is stern;
It bids me fondle with a blow.
What did He answer in the grove
When Christ in sweat and anguish strove,
Pleading: "Oh, take the cup away!"?
Did He withdraw that cup of pain?
That bitter draught Christ had to drain!

AGNES

By such a standard measured, all
Earth's spirits are foredoomed.

BRAND

To none
Is it revealed which mortals fall;
But He in flaming letters saith:
"Be faithful even unto death!"
Life's crown by haggling is not won.
That torture's sweat your brow suffuses
Will not the law's demands fulfill;
The martyr's fire awaits you still.
That you have not the strength excuses,
But never that you do not will!

AGNES

As you would have it, let it be!
Oh, where you mount, lift also me;
Lead me unto your lookout, high!
Strong is my purpose, weak am I;
Oft dread o'ercomes or dazed distress;
Oft lags my foot for weariness!

BRAND

Behold, the same requirement lies
On all, "No craven compromise!"
The man is damned in all his work,
Who doth its full completion shirk!
I will that creed to law enact,
Not by assertion but by act.

AGNES

[Clasps her arms about his neck.]

Oh, I will follow wheresoever
You lead me, ever with you keep.

BRAND

For two, thus heart-united, never
Will cliff or mountain be too steep!

*[Enters the doctor down the road and stops
just outside the garden wall.]*

THE DOCTOR

Halloa! Two cooing doves at play
On this bleak hillside, bare and grey?

AGNES

My dear old doctor, is it you?
Come in, come in!

[She runs down and opens the gate.]

THE DOCTOR

Hanged if I do!

You know I'm angry with you both
And reason have I to be wroth.
To make your home at such a spot
Where mountain storms and wintry blast
Pierce soul and body, sharp and cold . . .

BRAND

No, not the soul!

THE DOCTOR

No? As you will;

Indeed, it really seems not.
It seems your sudden promise still
In all its covenants stands fast;
Although, to follow usage old,
One would have sworn that could not last
Which in a moment's space was born.

AGNES

The sun's first beam, the bell of morn
Can usher in a summer-day.

THE DOCTOR

Farewell! A patient waits below.

BRAND

My mother?

THE DOCTOR

Yes. Will you that way?

BRAND

Not now.

THE DOCTOR
Perhaps have been there?

BRAND

No!

THE DOCTOR
Priest, you are hard. Across the hill
Through fog and sleet I've struggled still
Although, of course, I'm well aware
That like a beggar she will pay.

BRAND
God's blessing on your skill and care!
Her struggle, if you can, relieve!

THE DOCTOR
Bless my good will! I did not stay
More urgent message to receive.

BRAND
You she has summoned, me forgot!
I wait her message, wait and grieve.

THE DOCTOR
Come uninvited!

BRAND
Till she call,
A mission with her I have not!

THE DOCTOR [To Agnes.]
You poor, frail being, doomed to fall
Into such a heartless wretch's
Cruel, unrelenting clutches!

BRAND
I am not heartless.

AGNES

He would shed
His very heartblood any day
If that would wash her sin away!

BRAND

I, as her son, upon me took
Without complaint her reckoning-book.

THE DOCTOR

Pay off your own, sir!

BRAND

One man clears
The debts of many in their stead.

THE DOCTOR

Not when he's plunged above his ears,
Like any Lazarus, in debt.

BRAND

Dives or Lazarus, I will.
The will alone suffices still.

THE DOCTOR

[*Gazes steadily upon him.*]

Yes, will has many entries set
Unto its credit. Love has none;
Its page is innocent of one.

[*Exit the doctor.*]

BRAND

[*Gazes after him a moment.*]

There is no word so oft degraded
As "love" to disingenuous uses.

Man, by employing it, is aided
To screen that he his part refuses.
By it, designing men conceal
The gaping emptiness they feel.
Though steep and slippery be the path,
Be cheery; love will shorten it.
Takes one the broad road to the pit,
There 's hope; love turns aside God's wrath.
Though one the voice of duty hear
And heed not, coldly or for fear,
Through love he may victorious be.
Though plainly he the right way see
And choose deliberately to rove,
A refuge he may find—in love.

AGNES

Yes, that is false. Yet often does
My spirit question: "Is it thus?"

BRAND

One thing is missing: will must first
By offerings slake the law's just thirst.
First must you will, not merely all
That can be done, both great and small,—
Not merely if the act contain
Balancing parts of joy and pain,—
But with enthusiastic joy
Though all things threaten to destroy.
It is not martyrdom to be
Impaled upon the cruel tree;
'T is to have willed, "Thus will I die!"—
Willed it, despite the flesh's cry—

Willed it, despite the spirit's pain!
Thus only you salvation gain.

AGNES

[Clings closely to him.]

When, frightened by the law's demand,
I, dumb with terror, idly stand,
Dismayed, unmanned, disheartened, weak,
Then speak, my noble husband, speak!

BRAND

When will is victor in the strife,
Then comes the proper time for love;
Then doth it settle like a dove,
Bearing the olive branch of life.
Where slack and spiritless men are,
The wisest love is hate.

[In terror.]

Hate, hate!

It means to will a world-wide war,
That simple word, so small and mild!
[He turns and goes hastily into the house.]

AGNES

[Looks through the open door.]

He kneels beside his little child;
As if soul-racked and desperate,
He on the cradle rocks his head
And locks in his strong arms the bed,
Like one who, for his child afraid,
Finds none to comfort, none to aid!
What riches of affection lies
Beneath this soul's impassive guise!

[110]

Alf dares he love, for never yet
His fangs the foul world-serpent set
Upon his heel.

[Cries out in alarm.]

Now, up he springs . . .
His hands in strong emotion wrings!
What sees he? He is pale as death!

BRAND

[Comes out on the steps.]

The messenger?

AGNES

Yet loitereth.

BRAND

[Looks back into the house.]

His little head is all afire,
His temples throb, his pulse beats higher . . .
Oh, fear nought, Agnes!

AGNES

Heavens, the thought . . .

BRAND

Be not alarmed, child! . . .

[He shouts across the road.]

There he runs!

A MAN

[Calls through the garden gate.]

Come with me, priest!

BRAND

At once! At once!
Give me the message you have brought!

[III]

THE MAN

The sort is singular, at least.
She raised her head and forward bent
And said aloud: "Go fetch the priest!
Half of my wealth for the sacrament!"

BRAND [*Draws back.*]

Half, said you? Say not so!

THE MAN

[*Shaking his head.*]

To give

Aught other answer would deceive!

BRAND

But half? 'T was surely "all" she meant!

THE MAN

Perhaps so; but, distinct and clear,
She spoke the words. We all could hear
And not so quickly I forget!

BRAND

Upon the judgment day and set
Before Jehovah, would you dare
That this was what she uttered, swear?

THE MAN

I would, sire!

BRAND

[*Firmly.*]

This reply is sent,
"I go not with the sacrament!"

THE MAN

[*Looks at him incredulously.*]

But, priest, there surely must be some

Miscomprehension; what I said
Is somehow misinterpreted.
It is your mother bids you come.

BRAND

I know no double test of sin
For strangers and my kith and kin.

THE MAN

Harsh words are these!

BRAND

She knows the call
Is that she offer nought or all!

THE MAN

Oh, sire!

BRAND

The smallest fragment urge,
Of golden calf as well can be
The object of idolatry.

THE MAN

I will apply your answer's scourge
As gently as I can and must.
She may console her with the trust,
God is not merciless like you!

[*Exit.*]

BRAND

That confidence is nowise new.
It is the blight of men and nations;
With prayers and tears and lamentations
The lax judge may be mollified
Though to that very hour defied.

Of course! You knew your man of old;
It is as plain as anything
And from his doings might be told,
The dotard's caught by chaffering!
[*The man meets another outside. Enter both.*]

BRAND

Fresh tidings?

THE FIRST MAN

Yes.

BRAND

What has she sent?

THE SECOND

Nine-tenths her fortune, to atone.

BRAND

Not all?

THE SECOND

Nay.

BRAND

My reply is known,
"I go not with the sacrament."

THE SECOND

In fear and anguish begs she for you . . .

THE FIRST

O priest, remember that she bore you!

BRAND

[*Wringing his hands.*]

I dare not use a different weight
To mete to enemy and friend.

[114]

THE SECOND

Her soul's distress is wild and great;
Come, priest, or absolution send!

BRAND [*To the first man.*]

Go, tell the dying what I said,
"Make bare the board for grace's bread!"

[*Exeunt the men.*]

AGNES

[*Clings closely to him.*]

Brand, oft I tremble at your word;
You flame up like Jehovah's sword!

BRAND

[*In a broken voice.*]

Doth not the world the battle join,
With scabbard empty at its loin?
Doth not the world my spirit wound
With its slack cowardice's blows?

AGNES

The terms are hard that you propound!

BRAND

Aught milder if you dare, propose!

AGNES

Set such a mark for whom you will
And see if any it fulfill!

BRAND

There you good reason have to fear,
So narrow, empty, mean and low
The view of life is here below!

'T is thought to be a great thing here
That one should offer up his own
At death and, as a great unknown,
Make sacrifice by testament.
The hero bid, "Conceal your name,
With fruits of victory be content!"
Bid emperors and kings the same,
And what great things are left you, see!
The poet bid that secretly
His brilliant songsters he set free,
So not a soul should know 't was he
Gave tone and feather-finery!
Thriving or withered branches try;
In none you resignation find.
The earth-born spirit fills each mind.
Beyond the cliff's verge, dizzily
Each rudely, wildly, savagely
Unto the swaying vine-branch clings,
The life of selfish, earthy things . . .
But claws the tighter, when that fails,
To bark and fibre with his nails...

AGNES

And unto men who grope and fall,
You shout, unyielding, "Nought or all!"

BRAND

Whoso would win, must not retreat . . .
From lowest fall must highest rise!

[Is silent a moment, his tone changes.]

Yet, when I stand beside the feet
Of these and set before their eyes

The summons to ascend on high
By sacrifice, it is as I
Were on the storm-swept sea afloat
In but the wreckage of my boat.
I have in pain and torment bit
My tongue, unnoticed, while with it
I did th' unworthy wretch chastise.
Did I my arm for battle raise?
Child, even as you saw it rise,
My soul was sick for an embrace . . .
Go, Agnes, watch the babe, asleep!
All evil from his slumber keep
And sing him into radiant dreams!
The spirit of a little child
Is like a lake, sun-lighted, mild;
Across its bosom mother gleams
Like feathered songsters, mirrored bright
Within its depths in noiseless flight.

AGNES [*Turning pale.*]

What means it, Brand, that, wheresoever
You send your thought's swift arrows, ever
They turn to him?

BRAND

Oh, nothing, child;
But keep him safe and quiet.

AGNES

Give

A text to me.

BRAND

A stern?

AGNES

Nay; mild!

BRAND

[Embraces and fondles her.]

He who is without sin shall live!

AGNES

[Looks joyfully up to him and says:]

There 's one thing God may not require!

[Exit Agnes into the house.]

BRAND

[Stares moodily ahead.]

But, if He should? The Lord dares still
What once He dared, when in His ire
He gave command, "Young Isaac kill!"

[Shakes off the spell.]

No, no! My offering I brought,
Have given up my dearest thought,
Like God's own thunder-bolts to roll,—
The slumbering rouse, from pole to pole.
False! Sacrifice in that was none;
It vanished when the dream was done,—
When Agnes woke me, joined with me
To toil here in obscurity!

[Looks out along the road.]

The hours drag heavily. Why sends
She not consent to make amends
Which can alone her sin uproot
With every cancerous offshoot?
Look yonder! Nay, the shrieve is that,

Good-humored, nimble, sleek and fat!
Each hand stuck in his pocket is
Like braces of parenthesis.

THE SHRIEVE

[*Through the gate.*]

Good-day! We seldom see each other
And 't is a sorry time to call . . .

BRAND

[*Points to the house.*]

Come in!

THE SHRIEVE

No, thanks! 'T is pleasant here.
Should my proposal you receive
With favor, I indeed believe,
It would result in good for all.

BRAND

State your proposal!

THE SHRIEVE

Ah, your mother
Is hopelessly struck down, I hear.
It makes me sad!

BRAND

I do not doubt.

THE SHRIEVE

It makes me very sad.

BRAND

Speak out!

THE SHRIEVE

Yet she is old. We all some day
Must travel o'er the self-same way.

As I was passing now your door,
I chanced to think, "It is to leap
As easy as it is to creep!"
And it was told me, furthermore,
By several that you and she,
Since your return, do not agree.

BRAND

Do not agree?

THE SHRIEVE

They say that she
Clings to her riches stubbornly,
You think she holds the strings too tight.
Well, one should not neglect his right;
She holds, although you are of age,
The undivided heritage.

BRAND

Yes, undivided, there's no doubt.

THE SHRIEVE

Thus often relatives fall out;
And, as for various reasons I
Suppose that you with tearless eye
The hour of her demise await,
This interview I humbly seek
And hope that with no umbrage you
Will hear me, though the hour, 't is true,
Is not well chosen.

BRAND

Soon or late
To me is immaterial; speak!

THE SHRIEVE

Then to the point, without delay;
When she is dead and laid away
Beneath the mould, which will be soon,
You will be wealthy.

BRAND

Think you so?

THE SHRIEVE

I do not think so, man; I know!
She has a farm in each commune
As far as one with glass could see;
You will be rich.

BRAND

Despite probate?

THE SHRIEVE [*With a smile.*]

What need of probate can there be?
Its office is to arbitrate
The various claims to an estate;
But here there is no other claim.

BRAND

Yet if another should be there
And make his contest just the same
And say, "I am the lawful heir"?

THE SHRIEVE

The devil alone could be that man.
Depend upon me, no one can
Have aught to say in this affair;
Trust me, I know it through and through.
Well, then you will be well-to-do,—

Be footloose and no longer shut
Up in this corner of creation—
Then opens to you the whole nation!

BRAND

Shrieve, this proposal, tersely put,
Was it not merely meant to say,
“I wish that you would go away”?

THE SHRIEVE

About that; yes, I think 't would be
Best all around. If you will look
The people over carefully
For whom you now expound the book,
You will discover, you suit these
Who live here, much as wolves suit geese.
Now, understand me, you possess
Undoubted talents, fit to grace
The great world, but quite out of place
In one who calls himself the squire
Of rocks and clefts and wilderness
And lord of sinkholes and of mire.

BRAND

One's native town beneath his foot
Is what is to the tree its root;
If for his work it hath no need,
His song is ended, damned his deed!

THE SHRIEVE

The first law orders that all deeds
Be suited to the country's needs.

BRAND

Who sees best, from on high looks down,
Not from a clift-pent nook in town.

THE SHRIEVE

Such words suit great communities,
Not men in this impoverished vale.

BRAND

Fie on your fancied boundaries
Between the lowland and the heights!
Of sovereign realms you claim the rights
But in all public duties fail;
You cowards think 't will hold you free
To whine out, "Little folks are we!"

THE SHRIEVE

All things in their due season; an age
Has its own business, Brand, to manage,—
Each generation, its affair.
Our town has also given its share
To make the rounded complement
Of the great world's accomplishment.
It was not recent, to be sure;
In fact, 't was many years ago.
The share was not so trifling, though.
The town is now despised and poor
But its renown yet lives in story.
In old King Bele's lifetime fell
The days of this departed glory;
And many legends still they tell
Of the two brothers, Ulf and Thor,
And brave men who, a handful, went

On conquest bent, to Britain's shore
And plundered to their hearts' content.
Then screamed the southrons, cold with
fear,
"God save from the barbarians' might!"
And these barbarians were, despite
All sort of question, men from here.
Oh, but the fellows knew to fight,
To murder, ravish, torture, maim,
With sword or battle-axe or flame!
Tradition yet preserves the name
Of one bold knight who took the cross;
That he set out, there 's no report . . .

BRAND

A numerous offspring surely grew
From that bold man of promise?

THE SHRIEVE

True!

How did you know it?

BRAND

Oh, because
The strain seems rather plain to trace
In knights of promise nowadays
Whose grand crusades are of that sort.

THE SHRIEVE

Yes, his descendants still remain.
But we were in King Bele's reign.
First did we foreign lands despoil,
Then visited our savage ire
On neighbors' and on kinsmen's soil . . .

Their harvests and their homes laid waste—
Their fanes and dwellings set on fire—
Fame's garlands on our temples placed.
Now, though the gore which then was shed
May have been somewhat magnified,
By what I have already said
I feel that I am justified
In pointing to the glorious past
When this, our parish, had its day
In the great ages long ago
And in maintaining that we cast
Our quota, both with flame and lance,
Toward furthering the world's advance.

BRAND

And still it strikes me, you betray
Your sires' hereditary trust,
Reduce with harrow, plow and hoe
King Bele's heritage to dust.

THE SHRIEVE

By no means, should you happen by
The parish banquet-board, when spread,
Where justice, sexton, clerk, and I
As guests of honor may be found,
You'll see that, when the punch goes 'round,
King Bele's memory is not dead.
In toasts, in clang of glasses, song,
And in orations, short or long,
His greatness is remembered; I
Myself have very frequently
Been mastered by my inclination

To celebrate his memory.
And many a townsman's aspiration
Was strengthened by these words from me.
I like a little poetry.
Indeed, we all do, now and then;
But, mark you, in strict moderation.
It never ought one's life control;
But of an evening, seven to ten,
When people are at leisure, they,
Worn with the labors of the day,
Need inspiration such as this,
To freshen and uplift the soul.
The difference between us is
That you with violence and spite
Would plow and at the same time fight;
'T is your intention, so it seems,
To reconcile our lives and dreams,
Potato-culture join with war
In God's cause in as singular
A way as chemists powder roll
From nitre, sulphur and charcoal.

BRAND

Just so.

•THE SHRIEVE

It cannot here be done;
Such things are feasible alone
Out in the world. Go thither, and
Leave us to plow the sea and land.

BRAND

Plow first your boast deep in the sea
About your sires' nobility;

No dwarf a full-sized man will be
Although Goliah's grandson, he!

THE SHRIEVE

Growth springs from noble memories.

BRAND

When linked with life the memory is;
But of the mound of memory
You do but fashion a device
To cloak your imbecility.

THE SHRIEVE

My first remains my last advice.
'T were best that you should go away;
For you will find that, if you stay,
Your labors will not flourish here,
Mankind will not your message hear.
The little soaring that's required,
What inspiration is desired
At times when freed from drudgery,
I will provide assiduously.
The fruits of my administration
Bear witness to my application;
I have increased the population
To three times what it used to be;
At my initiative appeared
Many a prosperous industry;
Against this stubborn nature we
Have made advances rapidly;
Here built a bridge, here highways cleared—

BRAND

But not connecting life and creed.

THE SHRIEVE

Connecting fjord and snow-topped height.

BRAND

But not the thought and worthy deed.

THE SHRIEVE

First public ways of transportation,
First channels of communication!
We were in harmony at least
Before you came to be our priest.
Now have you jumbled all together,
Our flambeau and the Northern Light;
Who in a chaos such as this
Can for his life discover whether
All is as should be or amiss?
What ails us or the remedies?
All stations have you mixed together;
You have divided and incited
Into two camps of enemies
The flocks which might have won, united.

BRAND

Here I remain, in spite of you;
One cannot choose at his desire
Where he his life-work is to do.
The soul that knows what part is his
And wills it, sees in words of fire
The summons, "Here your station is!"

THE SHRIEVE

Then stay, but in your boundaries!
The people from their sin and crime
Which in our day is prevalent,
That you should shrive, I am content;
God knows 't is needed many a time!

But only make not holy days
Of labor's six nor banners raise
As if Jehovah stood on board
Every craft that sails our fjord!

BRAND

For your advice to be of use,
My spirit I must yield, and views;
The summons is, one's self to be,
One's own cause bear to victory.
So shall I bear this cause of mine
Until around my home 't will shine.
The people whom in every age
Your gang of rulers lulled to sleep,
Shall be aroused! In narrow cage
Too long already did you keep,
Imprisoned and oppressed with pains,
What mountain-character remains.
From your starvation treatment come
The patients, spiritless and dumb.
Their best blood did you tap and suck,
The marrow of their courage steal
And into splinters have you struck
The souls which ought to stand like steel.
But, deaf and stupid as you are,
The clarion of a new life's peal
Can in your ears yet thunder: "War!"

THE SHRIEVE

War?

BRAND

War!

THE SHRIVE

If you for weapons call,
Yourself will be the first to fall.

BRAND

Some day mankind will understand,
The soul is victor o'er its foe
That seems to suffer overthrow!

THE SHRIVE

Consider well! Be on your guard!
Now at the road's fork do you stand.
Risk all not on a single card!

BRAND

Yet so I do!

THE SHRIVE

All will be lost,
If thus you throw away your life;
Brand, I beseech you, count the cost!
The riches of this world is yours—
That much your mother's death assures—;
You have a child, a lovely wife
To live for; fortune's treasure-urn
Doth at your very feet outpour
With lavish hand its golden store;
To seize it, scarcely need you turn.

BRAND

But, if I notwithstanding spurn
What you call "fortune's treasure-urn" . . .
If I must do so . . . ?

THE SHRIEVE

If you do,—

Lost, ere it opens, is the fight,
If here upon earth's outskirts you
Against the world-foe try your might!
Go south to richer regions where
To stand with brow erect men dare.
There it were possible and right
That the dumb populace should fight
And should their blood in God's cause shed;
The sacrifice before us set
Is not of heart's blood but of sweat
In moiling for our daily bread
Upon this black and barren waste.

BRAND

Here I remain; my home it is
And there my battle-field is placed.

THE SHRIEVE

Think what you hazard if defeated
And, first and foremost, what you miss!

BRAND

Myself were lost if I retreated.

THE SHRIEVE

A solitary knight must fall.

BRAND

I have the best, strong is my host!

THE SHRIEVE [Smiling.]

Yes, possibly, but I the most!

[Exit shrieve.]

BRAND [*Gazes after him.*]

Man of the people; all in all
Well-meaning, kind, good-natured and
In his way active, humble, warm,
And yet a scourge upon the land.
No landslide, pestilence or frost
Provokes one-half the ruin here
Or perpetrates one-half the harm
That such an earth-bound soul can cost
Year in, year out and every year!
Lives only can by plague be lost;
But he . . . how many thoughts are killed.
How many fresh young wills arrested
And utterly deprived of might!
How many glorious songs are stilled
By such a narrow, hollow-chested,
Deaf, dumb and blind, dull-witted wight!
How many a smile in people's eyes,
In people's breasts how many a glow,
How many a heart-felt prayer to rise
Did he without compassion smother!

[*In sudden anguish.*]

The message! Is it not at hand?
Ah, yes! The doctor!

[*He runs down to meet him.*]

Speak! My mother . . . ?

THE DOCTOR

Doth now before the great judge stand.

BRAND

Dead? But repentant?

THE DOCTOR

Hardly so!

She clung to what she owned below
Until the hour struck and they parted.

BRAND

[Trembling, gazes straight ahead.]

Is then her spirit lost?

THE DOCTOR

Nay, child!

Perhaps the sentence will be mild,
According not to law but grace.

BRAND

[In a subdued tone.]

What said she?

THE DOCTOR

This, beneath her breath:

"God is not, like my son, hard-hearted!"

BRAND

In qualms of conscience, throes of death,
The thirst for truth that lie allays.

[He buries his face in his hands.]

THE DOCTOR

[Approaches, looks upon him and shakes his head.]

A stage long since lived out you would
In its old vigor re-enact;
You thunder that the law's compact
For God and people yet stands good.
Its way has every generation.

Ours is to scoff at stories vain
Of hell-fire and the soul's damnation;
Its first command is: "Be humane!"

BRAND

Humane? Yes, that impotent word
Is now earth's watchword, always heard!
Behind it, every wretch conceals
That nothing dares he, nothing wills!
'T is something every whelp throws over him
Who risks not all for victory.
For vows forsaken cowardly,
Each ne'er-do-well would have it cover him.
Ye will turn man to that inanity,
A weakling "lover of humanity."
To Jesus Christ was God humane?
Had that been in your dotard's reign,
Propitiation had been given
As a diplomatic note from heaven.
[*He covers his head and sits in silent grief.*]

THE DOCTOR [Softly.]

Rage on! Rage on, wild spirit in
Thy storm of anguish and of woe!
Yea, it had better for thee been,
Were penitential tears to flow!

AGNES

[*She has come out on the steps. Pale
and terror-stricken she whispers to the
doctor.*]

Come with me!

THE DOCTOR

You alarm me, child!

What is it?

AGNES

Dread hath, fold on fold,
Coiled 'round my heart, like serpents cold—

THE DOCTOR

What is it?

AGNES

[Draws him with her.]

Come! I shall go wild!

[Exeunt both into the house. Brand does not observe it.]

BRAND *[Softly to himself.]*

Dead, as she lived, impenitent!
Is not God's hand in this to see?
The debt she shrunk from, every cent,
Though many times more grievous were't,
Shall to the full be paid by me.
Now woe to me, should I desert!

[He rises.]

Now with my duty as a man
Here where my own earth-life began,
Unflinchingly, God's chosen knight,
I shall for the soul's triumph fight.
The Lord's great sword for arms bear I,
And He, lest I should spare with it,
In me His ball of wrath hath lit!
Now stand I at will's very fountain,
Now dare I, can I crush a mountain!

THE DOCTOR

[Enters, followed by Agnes; runs out on the steps and calls in a loud voice.]

Forsake this house and flee this spot!

BRAND

Though earth should quake, yet I would not!

THE DOCTOR

Then is your child condemned to die!

BRAND

[Wildly.]

My child? My child? What madman's play
Or fancy is this? Alf!

[He seeks to go into the house.]

THE DOCTOR *[Restrains him.]*

No, stay!

Here never doth the sunlight fall;
Here to the heart like polar breezes,
The north wind penetrates and freezes;
And chilling mists encompass all.
In this foul spot, one winter's stay
Will wither his frail life away.
Go, and he will escape death's power!
Go soon—at once—tomorrow, best!

BRAND

Tonight! This day! This very hour!
My boy shall strong and healthy grow.
No glacier's dampness, bleak coast's snow
Shall longer chill his little breast.
Dear, lift him gently in his sleep!
Away, away, across the deep!

Oh, Agnes, Agnes! Death had spun
His web around our little son!

AGNES

I felt it, trembled secretly
But did not half the peril see.

BRAND [*To the doctor.*]

The change will save him? That, you swear!

THE DOCTOR

The life a father watches near
By night and day, is sure to win.
Live but for him and strong and fair
You soon wil have him, do not fear!

BRAND

Thanks! Thanks!

[*To Agnes.*]

Soft down enfold him in!
The night wind blows along the shore!

[*Exit Agnes into the house.*]

THE DOCTOR

[*Stands, looking at Brand in silence. Brand gazes with fixed eyes upon the door. The doctor walks over to him, lays his hand upon his shoulder and says:*]

To others' prayers deaf before,
To all the world's flock harsh and stern;
Now to yourself indulgent quite!
From them, not much or little call,

But just the law's full "nought or all!"
But straightway takes your courage flight
The moment that the tables turn,
The lamb to offer is your own!

BRAND

What mean you?

THE DOCTOR

You unto your mother
The letter of the law alone
Presenting, cried, "There is no other
Method by which your soul to save
Than freely sacrificing all
And, stripped, descending to your grave!"
And often have we heard that call
When most severely men were tried,
Now 't is yourself who are afloat
In the upturned wreck of your boat
On fate's tempestuous ocean, wide;
And now you pitch each scorching word
About damnation overboard . . .
Cast into the sea the heavy book
Wherewith your brothers' breasts you
struck!
Now is it, in the tempest wild,
To guard the life of your own child!
Away! Away! By fjord and bay!
From your own mother's corse away!
Away from flock and call! Ah, yes;
The priest announces a recess
Of sacrificial service!

BRAND

[Smites his forehead wildly, as if to drive his thoughts together.]

When

Was I mistaken, now or then?

THE DOCTOR

But what a father should, do you!
Think not I carp at what you do;
You are far greater in my sight
In this curtailed and humbled plight
Than any headstrong mortal is
When posing as a man of might.
Farewell! A mirror I have given.
Use it and sigh, "Oh, Lord of Heaven!
A Heaven-stormer looks like this!"

BRAND

[Stands for a moment, looking straight before him, then suddenly exclaims:]

Bear with me, Lord! And show me: When
Was I mistaken—now or then?

[Agnes enters from the house, with a wrap about her shoulders and with the child in her arms. Brand does not see her. She moves as if she would speak, but stops as if palsied when she beholds the expression on his face. At this moment enters a man, running in at the gate. The sun goes down.]

THE MAN

Listen, you have an enemy!

BRAND

[*Strikes his hand upon his breast.*]

Yes; here!

THE MAN

Your eye keep on the shrieve!

Your seed had thrived luxuriantly
Throughout the country till his spite
Upon it vented slander's blight,
For he has hinted frequently
That soon the parsonage will be
Deserted and unoccupied,
That flock and mission would you leave
The moment your rich mother died.

BRAND

And, were that true? . . .

THE MAN

I know you well

And understand, I'm satisfied,
Why he should slanderous stories tell.
Him and his wishes you oppose
And, howsoever he has tried,
He never forced your will to quail;
That is the reason for his tale!

BRAND

[*In a hesitating manner.*]

But that the tale were true, suppose?

THE MAN

Then to us you have foully lied.

BRAND

Have lied?

THE MAN

How often did you say
That God Himself roused you to fight,
That with us is your home, the field
Where your first battles must be fought,
That no man dare his call betray,
That he must strike but never yield!
You have that call, for, strong and bright,
Your fire in many a breast has caught.

BRAND

But here the people's ears are sealed.
And every soul is spent and dull!

THE MAN

The falseness of your words you know . . .
That many a soul is brimming full
Of heaven's illuminating glow.

BRAND

In ten-fold more yet reigneth night!

THE MAN

You in the darkness are a light!
But be that as it will; to weigh
On scales a-veering either way
Can by no means be necessary,
For here am I . . . I, solitary, . . .
And say: "Go, leave me if you can!"
I have a soul to save or lose
As much as any other man
And books to aid me cannot use.
Me from the burning have you drawn.
Try, if you dare, to let me go!

You cannot, I will clutch you so;
Should my hold fail, all hope were gone!
Farewell! Secure, I wait the word,
"My priest doth not betray his Lord,
My shepherd doth desert me not!"

[*Exit the man.*]

AGNES [*Tremblingly.*]
Your lips are bloodless, your cheek pale
As if your inmost heart did fail!

BRAND
Each word, against the cliff's wall spoken,
With ten-fold power hath o'er me broken.

AGNES
[*Takes a single step forward.*]
I am prepared.

BRAND
Prepared? For what?

AGNES [*With emphasis.*]
For what a mother must and will.
[*Enters Gerd, running by along the road;
she halts at the gate.*]

GERD
[*Clasps her hand and screams in a spasm
of mad delight.*]
Did you hear? Off flew the priest;
From their grottoes in the hill
And their mountain caves released,
Imps and dragons swarm about,
Big and little, foul and black,

Oh, they hit me such a thwack,
Almost ripped my eyeballs out!
Half my soul they got by theft;
But I'll manage very well
With the portion that is left.
There's enough; and folks do tell
That enough's as good's a feast!

BRAND

Girl, your mind is wand'ring. Fie,
Your eyes fool you. Here am I!

GERD

You? Yes, you, but not the priest!
Down my hawk from Black-top spun,
O'er the heather as one sees
Vapors driven across the sun.
Bitted, saddled, furious, black,
Whizzed he on the evening breeze;
And the priest was on his back.
Now yon church deserted stands,
Stands with lock and bar made fast!
That foul church's day is past,
Mine now comes into its right.
There the priest puts forth his hands,
Blessing all men, full of might,
In his snowy vestments dressed,
Woven by the frost and dew!
Yours stands empty, you had best
Join me in my worship, too!
With such power my priest preaches
That around the world it reaches!

BRAND

Poor crushed soul, at whose command
Comest thou, me to mislead
With your tales of idol-creed?

GERD

[Comes within the gate.]

Idol? Oh, I understand!
Sometimes big and sometimes slight,
Always golden, always bright!
Idol? Hearken unto me!
See you where that woman stands?
'Neath the covering can you see
Baby-legs and baoy-hands?
See you how yon garment holds
Tenderly within its folds
A prized something she would keep
Which is like a babe, asleep?
Back she reels in her affright
And would hide it out of sight!
Idol? Sir, though there were none
In the world else, there were one.

AGNES

[To Brand.]

Have you prayers or a tear?
Mine are burned by horror out!

BRAND

Agnes, Agnes! Much I fear,
By a greater she was sent!

GERD

Listen! All the wild bells shout,
Pealing from the sheer ascent!

See the congregation; they
Straggling churchward wend their way!
Yonder can you recognize
The foul imps of undersize
Whom the priest drove 'neath the brine?
Canst the pygmy dwarfs define?
Until now they buried lay,
With his seal to warn away
Whoso would their prisons break!
Them nor seas nor graveyards hold;
Out they clamber, slimy, cold!
Yon imp-urchin doth awake
From his trance, laugh out and shake
Like a feathery burden from him
The great stones they laid upon him.
"Father!" shouts one, and another
With like clamor bawls for "mother."
Men and women make response.
Like a father with his sons,
Every man of them is walking,
With his own behind him stalking;
And her dead trolls to her breast
Hath each parish-woman pressed!
Ne'er so strutted she before
Even when her babe she bore
To baptismal sacrament!
It is gay since the priest went!

BRAND

Get thee from me, for I see
Far worse prospects!—

GERD

Now laughs he—

He who sits beside the road
Where it rises toward the height!
Each who strove to bear his load
To the mountain's lofty brow
Into his volume he doth write;
Nearly all are now his own.
Empty stands the old church now,
Bolted, barred and fastened tight;
With the hawk its priest has flown!

*[She vaults the garden wall and disappears
in the darkness. A long silence ensues.]*

AGNES

[Approaches Brand and says softly:]

It is time, now; let us go!

BRAND *[Gazes upon her.]*

Whither?

[He points first to the gate, then to the door.]

This or that way?

AGNES

[Draws back from him in horror.]

Oh!

Think of Alf, Brand!

BRAND *[Follows her.]*

Answer me!

Was I priest first, or a father?

AGNES

[Withdraws from him yet further.]

Were it asked in thunderous tone,
Still no answer would there be!

BRAND

[Pursuing her further.]

Answer must you; as the mother,
Here the right to judge you own!

AGNES

I am yours, and what you say
I will bow to and obey!

BRAND

[Seeks to take her arm.]

Take the cup of choice from me!

AGNES

[Springs behind a tree.]

I would then no mother be!

BRAND

Clearly did you answer then.

AGNES

[Firmly.]

Ask yourself if choice you see!

BRAND

There the answer sounds again!

AGNES

Do you, doubting not, believe it?
Hath God called you? Do you know?

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BRAND

Yes! [*He seizes her hand quickly.*]

And now, child, in your hands
Choice of life or death, I leave it.

AGNES

Go the way thy God commands!

[*A short pause.*]

BRAND

It is time, now; let us go!

AGNES

[*Breathlessly.*]

Which way go we?

[*Brand remains silent.*]

This?

[*She points toward the gate.*]

BRAND

No, this!

AGNES

[*Lifts the child aloft.*]

Lord, the sacrifice which is
Here required of me, do I
Raise unto Thee up on high!
Lead me through life's dreary night!

[*Exit Agnes into the house.*]

BRAND

[*Stands for a time, gazing fixedly before
him. Then bursts into tears, clasps his
hands above his head, casts himself down
upon the steps and cries out in agony:*]

Jesus, Jesus! Give me light!

[*Curtain.*]

ACT IV.

[*Christmas eve at the parsonage. It is dark in the room. The entrance is at the rear, a window is at one side and a door at the other. Agnes, clad in mourning, stands at the window, gazing out into the darkness.*]

AGNES

Still not here! It is so late,
And how hard it is to wait—
Voice my longing, cry on cry,—
Hark in vain for a reply!
Falls the snow now, like caresses,
And the roof of yon church dresses
As 't were in its winding-sheet! . . .

[*She listens.*]

Listen! Do I hear the ground
With the tramp of feet resound . . .
Heavy, rapid, hurrying feet?
[*She rushes to the door and throws it open.*]
Is it you? Come in, come in!

[*Enters Brand, covered with snow, wearing a great coat which he removes while she is speaking.*]

AGNES

[Throws her arms about him.]

Oh, how long the hours have been!
Love, if you do love me, then
Leave me never thus again;
For night's gloomy clouds alone
From my heart I cannot raise.
What an evening and what days
Have these days and evening grown!

BRAND

Child, indulge not fancies dreary;
You by solitude are wronged, for
I am here whom you have longed for!
*[He lights a single candle which casts a
faint light about the room.]*
You are pale!

AGNES

And faint and weary!
I have longed and watched and waited,
And a little green have plaited, . . .
Little, but my all it is,
Saved since summer sacredly
To adorn our Christmas tree;
This, I purposed, should be his!
His it was . . . a burial crown!

[She bursts into tears.]

See! 'T is near snowed under, down . . .
Heavens, that word!

BRAND

The churchyard.

AGNES

Oh,

How it echoes in my ears!
Say it never!

BRAND

Dry your tears!

AGNES

Yes, be patient with me, though,
Still my soul is rent and bleeding,
Still the wound is fresh and new!
Drop by drop my strength seeped through.
Oh, the hours will soon be speeding
And the griefs that overcome me—
They will in good time lift from me!
Then you shall not hear me weeping . . .

BRAND

This you would call Christmas keeping?

AGNES

Nay, I know; but patient be,
Think how, but the other day
Strong and lithesome, sprightly, gay;
Now thus borne away from me, . . .

[She chokes on the word.]

BRAND

[Firmly.]

To the churchyard!

AGNES

[Screams.]

Never say

That hard name!

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BRAND

It must be said

Loudly, if you are afraid,—
Thundered till the echoes roar
Like the breakers on the shore!

AGNES

Your heart also it makes groan
More than you consent to own.
Drippings from your forehead show
How for outward calm you pay!

BRAND

What you see upon me, know,
Is the angry billows' spray.

AGNES

Is the drop, too, in your eye
But a snowflake from the sky?
Nay, it is too warm; it sprang
From your stricken bosom's pang!

BRAND

Agnes, let us both, my wife,
Fight our grief down as for life;
All our strength together put
And press forward, foot by foot!
Oh, I was a man out there!
Waves beat madly on the rocks
And the gulls in silent flocks
Fought against the furious air!
Hail beat down upon the boat,
Stalled at half the voyage home!
Spray froze stiff upon my coat,
Whizzed and whistled mast and rope!

Whipped to rags, the sail was blown
Far astern before the foam!
Every joint did creak and groan.
From each precipice and slope
Avalanches, rushing down,
'Numbed the ears with deafening sound!
Eight men sat with idle oars,—
Each like, on a bier, a corse!
Then, with rudder in my hand,
Did I rise and take command
And, as with those powers I fought,
Once again I recognized,
God has truly me baptized
To my mission, dearly-bought!

AGNES

Easy 't is with storms to strive
Or a warrior's life to live!
Think of puny me who sit,
Save for sorrow's twitterings, still—
Strive in vain long hours to kill,
Howsoe'er I long for it!
Think of me, denied a place
In life's battle, me whose eyes
Of the action see no trace!
Think of me to whom is given
But a part which all despise
That in real wars have striven!
Think of me! I s't at home,
Tortured by the thoughts which come—
Thoughts I dare not dwell on, yet
Cannot utterly forget!

BRAND

Is your part so petty, though?
Child, it never has been so
Grand and glorious as now!
Listen to me! I will tell
Something that myself befell
When grief clamped about my brow.
Then my spirit's vision oft
Was beclouded and depressed
And within my burdened breast
My resolve became so soft
That to weep a blessing spelled.
Agnes, then mine eyes beheld
The Great Father bending o'er me,
Gently, pityingly before me—
Oh, so close, it did appear
It were easy to draw near!
How my spirit longed to be
The stray lamb upon his breast, . . .
In His strong arms, fatherly,
Warmly, gently to be pressed!

AGNES

Brand, behold Him thus alway,
As the God you dare draw near,
As a kind and loving pastor,
More a father, less a master!

BRAND

Nay, I dare not bar the way
To the work He gave me here!
Strong and mighty must He be,

Great as the high Heaven to me;
Such a God this age must know,
Since it is itself not so!
You, my child, may hold Him near,
See in Him a father dear,
On his breast recline your head,
Go to Him when ill and tired,
Leave Him healed and re-inspired,
From your eyes the radiance shed,
Bringing with you Heaven's glow
Unto where I moil below!
Agnes, hearken; thus to share,
The true marriage resteth there!
One must labor, fight, defend;
One must bleeding wounds attend!
Only thus the saying's true,
One flesh are they, who were two.
Since you left your former life
And came unto me as wife,
Since you chose this work to do,
Wifely duties fall to you.
Mine's to fight unto the end,
Battling in the sun's hot rays,
Guarding, ready to defend,
Morning, evening, noon, always;
While your part is to fill up
To the brim the loving-cup,
With your woof of tenderness
Wrap my breast as with a shawl
'Neath the cold, hard shield! Ah, yes!
Child your part is great, not small!

AGNES

Every duty is, at length,
All too heavy for my strength!
For my myriad thoughts have grown,
Clustering 'round this thought alone!—
All is yet a dreamy tale.
Let me weep, Brand, let me wail;
Later, aid me to be clear
As to all my duties here!
Brand, last night while you were gone,
Came he to my little room.
On his cheeks health's rose did bloom.
In his night-shift thinly dressed,
Gingerly he toddled on
Unto where I lay at rest, . . .
Reaching unto me the while, . . .
Greeting mother with a smile, . . .
As for warmth he might be teasing!
Oh, I saw it! Oh, I chill! Oh! . . .

BRAND

Agnes!

AGNES

Yes, our child was freezing!
Brand, indeed he must, out there
On his cold, hard, shavings pillow!

BRAND

But the body's 'neath the sod,
Alf has risen unto God.

AGNES

You my wound asunder tear!
Cruel to entreat me so

In my agony of woe!
What you roughly "body" call
Is the dead child to me; all
Is to me both flesh and soul.
I have not the power, like you,
To discern between the two;
Each is unto me the whole.
Alf who 'neath yon snowdrift lies,
Alf is, also, in the skies!

BRAND

Many a wound must wide be riven
Ere from this you shall be free!

AGNES

Yes, but patient with me be;
I am better led than driven.
Stand beside me, hold me, Brand;
All thy gentleness command!
At momentous times you own
The relentless tempest's tone;
When a spent soul is to lay
Its one crown of life away,
Have you not a milder strain
To deliver it from pain?
Not one word, Brand, to sustain
Nor to point one to the day?
God, whom you would have me learn
Is a monarch on His throne.
Dare I to this Monarch turn
With my petty mother-moan?

BRAND

Were it better that you bore
Such to gods you knew before?

AGNES

Never, never down again!
Yet I have known moments when
I was drawn by longing where
It was glowing with life's sun.
Doth not the old proverb run,
"Light to lift, heavy to bear?"
For me is your realm too great;
All things here too big for me,
You, your mission, purpose, fate,
All your deeds and all your ways,
Mountains frowning on the sea,
Fjord that outward progress stays,
Gloom, grief, memory, sorrow, all—
The church only is too small!

BRAND

What? Too small? That thought again?
Is it in the very air?
Why too small?

AGNES

Can I explain,
So my reason shall seem fair?
Do not such impressions steal
As wind-wafted scent of rose?
Whence exhales it? Whither goes?
'T is enough that I can feel,
Though I nothing know at all,
This poor church is much too small!

BRAND

Meaning's in the people's dream;
Souls by hundreds have I met
That the same thought did beget!
Unto her who could but scream,
Maddened, on yon heights, it stood,
"Mean the church is, mean and small!"—
Spoke thus, but in no wise could
Reason for her saying give.
Yet the thought appears to live;
Women's voices sound the call,
"This poor church is mean and small!"
From their lips this yearning cry
Voices need of arches high.
Agnes, clear is it as day,
You are she whom God selected
To attend me on my way;
Sure and confident, though blind,
You the narrow path can find
Where I pass it unsuspected.
Never wert thou misdirected
By will-o'-the-wisps; the way
To the true field of creation
Found you on that earliest day;
Checked my predetermination
To soar vainly in the sky;
Turned within myself mine eye,
Inward, to the innermost!
Agnes, you again have spoken
Words which have, alike the host
Of God's sunlight, night's power broken;

Guided me when like to stray;
Oped my pathway to the day!
Yes, God's church is mean and small
But it soon shall tower o'er all;
Never saw I till this minute
All the blessings that were in it,
When you came to share my lot!
Therefore, child, like you I say:
"Leave me not! Oh, leave me not!"

AGNES

I from grief will shake me free,
Dry mine eyes of every tear,
Shut the lid on memory
As upon a corse's bier!
I will lay oblivion's sea
'Twixt my buried past and me,
Will each comfort-giving trace
Of my fancy world erase
And be just a wife for you!

BRAND

My road leads to mighty things!

AGNES

Lead not thorny pathways through!

BRAND

Through me doth a Greater speak!

AGNES

As yourself have told me, One
Who has sworn not to disown
The soul's willing offerings
For that flesh has proved too weak!

[She starts to go.]

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BRAND

Whither?

AGNES

I must not neglect
Household duties, least tonight!
Last Yule-tide, you recollect,
You pronounced me prodigal;
From each pine-branch a wax light
Shone upon the playthings all
And the gay, green Christmas tree.
There were songs, then, shouts of glee!
These, to mark this holiday,
I will light again today;
We shall beautify our hall
For this quiet festival.
Should God's eye upon us fall,
A meek daughter he will find
And a son with soul resigned,
Chastened children who perceive
That they dare not sit and grieve
'Neath their Father's wrath—or stand,
Spurning the gifts of His hand.
Brand, can you a trace descry
Of the tear-drops in mine eye?

BRAND

[*Clasps her to him and releases her again.*]
Light the candles, child, for this
Your appropriate service is.

AGNES [*With a sad smile.*]

Build your church, so lofty, then,—

But ere summer comes again!

[*Exit Agnes.*]

BRAND

Willing, willing in the throes
Of the pangs that rend and kill;
Willing in the martyr's fire;
When strength fails, her soul mounts higher!
Thus she struggles, bowed with woes,
Though she doth the off'ring will!
Sire, thy strength bring into play;
Take from me this cup away,
Bitter cup to have to draw
The fierce vultures of the law,
Laving in the precious flood
Of her heart's warm, pulsing blood!
Whatso doth become a man,
That Thou wouldst of me, I can!
Put on me a double weight,
Be to her compassionate!

BRAND

[*There is a knock at the door. Enters the shrieve.*]

THE SHRIEVE

Salutes you here a fallen foe!

BRAND

How fallen?

THE SHRIEVE

Yes, as such I bow.
You probably remember how,
Last summer—'t is some time ago—

Unsparring enmity I swore
And never to let up, before
You yielded; then I prophesied
Aught but the best result for you
Of this affair between us two.

BRAND

And now?

THE SHRIEVE

Though still I think I'm right,
I will no longer with you fight.

BRAND

Why not?

THE SHRIEVE

Because you have the most.

BRAND

I have?

THE SHRIEVE

I think you know it, too.
The people in a mighty host
From far and near flock unto you.
There has, especially of late,
A spirit risen in the State
Which is, the Lord knows, none of mine;
And, therefore, have I dared opine
That you are author of its life.
Well, here's my hand; we'll end the strife!

BRAND

A war, like this one, never ends
Because that one man's courage bends.

THE SHRIEVE

What more is needed that war cease
Than mutual amity and peace?
I'm not a stupid fool who kicks,
Like brutes and madmen, 'gainst the pricks.
I was created like the rest;
I will surrender when I feel
The sharp point of a foeman's steel
Pressed menacingly to my breast.
If one has but a club to meet
A spear, he ought betimes to flee.
Should one a single warrior be,
The wisest valor is, "Retreat."

BRAND

In what you say, two things I see
Well worthy note, it seems to me:
First, then, you openly confess
That I am stronger, I possess
A clear majority—

THE SHRIEVE

That's true.

BRAND

Now, it is possible, I do;
But on the great and final day
When, who is victor to decide,
We must our sacrifices weigh,
Who'll have the balance on his side?

THE SHRIEVE

The day of sacrifice? Why, man,
That day will never come, nor can.

The off'ring surely nothing worse is
Than lightening the people's purses.
Humane the times are, do not call
On any man to sacrifice
Things which command a higher price.
And most vexatious of it all
It is that I helped in the reign
Of the new doctrine, "Be humane!"
And thus prevented, one might say,
The call for greater sacrifice.
It might be said, too, in a way,
Myself I offered as the price,—
In any case the hickory stripped
Wherewith at life's end I am whipped.

BRAND

It may well chance that you are right;
But, for the rest, I am not quite
Enlightened how you dare to yield.
Victor or vanquished in the field,
Each man is for his part created,
Is for it fitted, to it fated.
His work should Heaven to him be.
If, parting it from him, a sea
Seethed threateningly, while there lay
The land of Satan, safe and near,
Dare he exclaim: "Avaunt, away!
Curses on such a way to go!
The road to hell is shorter here!"

THE SHRIVE

To that I answer "yes" and "no",
One must put into port somewhere.

With no results for all his pain,
Who would pursue a project vain?
For in a small, as great, affair,
Man for his labors wants returns,
The wages that he fairly earns.
If fighting will not win, instead
One must by soft means worm ahead.

BRAND

Say what you will, black is not white.

THE SHRIEVE

My good sir, it is useless quite
And but a weariness of soul
To call a thing as white as coal
When all men cry, 't is black as snow.

BRAND

So you would join them?

THE SHRIEVE

Hardly so,

I would not call it black but grey.
The time's humane; men must be met
In all their differences halfway,
Not plump against each other set.
Remember that the land is free,
The views of all make up the whole.
Then how dares one insist that he
Ought to be constituted sole
Arbiter over black and white?
In short, since the majority
Agrees with you, you are by right
The chief of the community.

Your lead I follow then, as best
I bring myself to, like the rest;
And hope that no one will contend
I fought not gamely to the end.
The folks consider, it is very
Plain, that my deeds are mean and poor.
One thing they deem more necessary
Than greater harvests to secure;
Willing no more are they to pay
The taxes I upon them lay;
And if the will's not in the game,
The undertaking's but a name.
'T is somewhat hard, you understand,
To give up plans I had in hand
For building bridges—stone, not wood—
And highways, draining marshy land
And much else for the public good.
But, Heavens, what's a man to say?
If win he can't, he must give way,—
Must with discretion step aside
And patiently his time abide.
If then I lost the people's grace
In much the manner it was won;
I must contrive in other ways
To win my quondam power again.

BRAND

Were all the great things you have done
Aimed but to keep your hold on men?

THE SHRIEVE

Not so; God knows that was not it!
I worked for the shire's benefit,—

But don't deny the imputation
That I had hoped for compensation.
Here's how it is; an active man
With good sense and ability
His hope's fruition likes to see,
Not suffer toil and pain, to be a
Mere champion of an idea.
I dare not, do the best I can,
Neglect my individual matters,
Give freely my ability;
I have a growing family,
I have a wife and several daughters
Who must be taken care of, first.
Ideas slake no person's thirst,
Ideas fill no hungry mouths
Where one like me has a full house.
Should some one claim that he is filled
With horror and amaze at this,
I should but answer that he is
A very scurvy sort of father.

BRAND

Now it is your intent?

THE SHRIEVE

To build.

BRAND

To build?

THE SHRIEVE

Or my intention, rather—
For the town's uses and—my own!
First, build anew the reputation,

I had, not many years ago.
The time before election's short
And to strong means I must resort,
Must start an active preparation
Some undertaking to pursue
If I am to be storthing's-man
And not be ousted for a new.
I estimate it thus: One can
Make sorry headway 'gainst the stream.
The people's will is, nowadays it
Seems, "to be lifted," as they phrase it.
The height of folly it would be
For me to pander to that dream;
To help men forge ahead, for me
Is possible, but merely those
Who with what I propose, agree.
But these do all my plans oppose;
Hence, after due deliberation,
I've reached this strange determination:
If this continues, as it never
Has done before, I will endeavor
To conjure up a remedy
For the effects of poverty.

BRAND

You will destroy it?

THE SHRIEVE

No, it is,
In ours as all societies,
A necessary evil; cured
It cannot be, must be endured!

But with a little skill one may
To certain forms the ill confine,
Establish a strict quarantine
And hinder it from getting sway
If 't is but taken in good time.
We know the bog of poverty
In all lands everywhere to be
The surest breeding-place of crime.
Before it, I determined am
To elevate a solid dam.

BRAND

How will you do it?

THE SHRIEVE

Can you guess?

To fill a long-felt want I shall
Erect a pauper-hospital
For the community. Yes, yes ;
I call it "hospital" because
It crime's infection will prevent.
The structure, also, I have meant
To have embrace a jail as well
And thus, in one enclosure locked,
Will be the consequence and cause
With but a wall 'twixt cell and cell.
And, while I am about the thing,
'T is my intention to construct
Beneath the self-same roof a wing,
Fit for a hustings or a ball,
For serious events or feasts,
With rostrum and a place for guests,—
In short, a handsome public hall!

BRAND

They're needed sorely—the last, very!
Yet there's one thing more necessary.

THE SHRIEVE

What you are thinking of, must be a
Home for the feeble-minded; true,
'T is sorely needed! I, like you,
Had that identical idea;
But found that it would never do,
On sounding privately a few
Of our best citizens. For at
What door would you expect to knock
Which would an ample sum unlock
To build a house so big as that?
It must indeed be very great
If every one whose witless state
Entitles him to ward and care,
Is to be given shelter there.
One must consider what may be
The generation's tendency
And not build for himself alone.
With giant strides our progress is,
Last year to spare, too little this!
Behold to what stupendous size
Requirements of our land have grown!
With seven-league boots, like magic, rise
New powers and capabilities,
Of all sorts and varieties!
And so too dear a joke 't would be
To build for all posterity,
Instead of for one's family.

And, therefore, said I: "Deuce take me!
That tooth must out at once!"

BRAND

I see;

If any one should be too mad,
The town-hall's always to be had.

THE SHRIEVE [*Delighted.*]

That's true; 't is vacant usually.
That thought was very clever, Brand;
If it is builded as I planned,
We'll have a sanitarium free . . .
Beneath a common roof collect
And 'neath a single flag protect
The most essential elements,
Most shameful and disgraceful, whence
Our town its ill repute derives.
We have our paupers, those whose lives
To sin and crime are given o'er;
Our simpletons who roamed before
Adrift and aimlessly about,
Protection and restraint without;
And then the fruits of liberty,
Elections, flights of oratory;
We have our council hall where we
On public measures can agree
And may discuss the common weal;
We have our banquet-hall where we
Can give the earnest pledge we feel
To guard our great sires' memory
Grant only that my plans succeed,
Then will these mountaineers possess

All that in conscience they can need
To moderate their lives' distress.
God knows, our neighborhood is poor;
But, once this building we secure,
I think one well might say 't will be
An organized community.

BRAND

The means, though?

THE SHRIEVE

Yes, it pinches there

In this as every affair.
Of taxes are they all afraid;
And, if I am without your aid,
I know I must give up, 't is true;
There is no other thing to do.
But if you bolster my idea
With your support, then it will be a
Most simple thing to put it through.
And, if in this you will stand by me
Till it is settled, then will not
Your kind assistance be forgot.

BRAND

That is to say, you wish to buy me?

THE SHRIEVE

A milder name would I apply
To my design for mutual gain
To fill the chasm up again
Of enmity which hitherto
Has yawning stood between us two;
And both of us have lost thereby.

BRAND

An ill time have you chosen.

THE SHRIEVE

Oh,

Pray pardon that mistake! I know
The great bereavement that of late
Has fallen your house; but did not wait,
Because of your known public spirit.
The matter's urgent, but I fear it—

BRAND

In sorrowful as joyous season
I hold me ready equally
To do what is required of me:
But for another valid reason
This time your labor you have spilled.

THE SHRIEVE

And that is—?

BRAND

I myself will build.

THE SHRIEVE

What say you? Build? Steal my idea?

BRAND

No; not precisely.

[*Points out of the window.*]

Can you see a . . . ?

THE SHRIEVE

There?

BRAND

Yes.

THE SHRIEVE

That big hulk in the browse?
You mean the parson's cattle-house?

BRAND

No! No! Not that one . . .

THE SHRIEVE

Then pray what one?
I see none . . .

BRAND

Look! That ugly, squat one . . .

THE SHRIEVE

The church?

BRAND [Nodding.]

A temple it shall tower!

THE SHRIEVE

The deuce! You must not try it, Brand!
The old church undisturbed must stand;
Its fall would crush me in an hour.
My plans are ready and they need
To be put forward now with speed.
The two things are too much at once, so
Give way now!

BRAND

I have never done so!

THE SHRIEVE

This time you must, man; help me build
My jail and hospital and hall—
In short, asylum . . . ! No one cares
How the old house of worship fares.

What reason is there it should fall?
'T is not so bad, now, on the whole;
'T was always good enough before.

BRAND

Perhaps, but now it is too small.

THE SHRIEVE

Yet I have never seen it filled.

BRAND

Within a solitary soul
Can scarce find room to rise and soar.

THE SHRIEVE

[Shakes his head bewildered.]

That individual would, indeed,
Demonstrate my asylum's need.

[Alters his tone.]

"Hands off the church!" will I cry out.
The crowd will answer with a shout;
"Your sacrilegious meddling stay!
It is a relic, in a way,
The single, last-remaining, prized
Inheritance of a past age.
It is a sacred heritage
And shall not for a crotchet fall!"
Yes, if my plans are ruined all,
All my good projects are despised,
Yet from the ashes will I rise,
A phoenix in the people's eyes.
As champion, I here will stand
For this memorial on our strand.
The old gods' court was here before,

As lately as King Belè's days.
When they returned from venturous war,
Here did the Viking heroes raise
This church around their prey and booty.
Honorable in its simple beauty
And sacred in its ancient dress,
It stands there even to this hour . . .

BRAND

These tokens of their former power
Are long ago beneath the mould;
No vestige of them lingers.

THE SHRIEVE

Yes,

That's just the point; it is so old,
It is no longer of the earth.
Why, many years before my birth . . .
Then my grandfather was alive . . .
An ancient wall-hole did survive.

BRAND

A wall-hole?

THE SHRIEVE

Big and black did yawn.

BRAND

The wall was standing?

THE SHRIEVE

No; 't was gone.

Therefore I openly declare;
"Hands off the grey old ruin there!
To rase it were a lamentable,

Barbaric deed, incomparable!"
Where will you get the wherewithal?
Think you they are so prodigal
As give their money at the vision
Of such a half-fledged proposition,
When with but little cost and care
They can so far the old repair
That in our time it will not fall?
Go on and get your men in line;
This time the victory is mine!

BRAND

It is by no means my intent
To wring from them a single cent
To build a temple for my Lord.
I, with no wish for a reward,
Mine own inheritance will spend
To the last farthing to that end.
Now, shrieve, are you so certain still,
You can my undertaking kill?

THE SHRIEVE

[Folds his arms.]

I am like one just fallen down
From out the clouds; for scarcely known
Is such beneficence in town;
But in a parish like our own
Where always were all purses proof
'Gainst taxes for one's own behoof,
You cause a swelling flood to come,
Purling, sparkling, foaming, free!
No, Brand, I am indeed struck dumb.

BRAND

In thought I long have put from me
My heritage.

THE SHRIEVE

I had heard much
That pointed unto something such
But thought it must be idle chatter.
To sacrifice his all who uses,
When to no profit it conduces?
But that, sir, is your private matter.
As you push forward, I retreat;
You in the saddle have firm seat,
Can sweep along with giant tread
While step by step I worm ahead.
Brand, we will build the church together.

BRAND

What? Are you ready to let go
The wondrous plans you treasured so?

THE SHRIEVE

By heaven I am, and altogether!
Man, I were crazy, did I not!
To whom, think you, the crowd will swarm
When one would fatten, pamper, fill,
The other milk and shear and flay?
Join you? By all that 's good I will!
At once, this week, this very day!
I am at the conception hot,
I'm charmed, enraptured, taken by storm,
Stirred by it, with its beauty caught!
It was a blessed fate that brought

Me to the parsonage tonight,
For I dare promise, but for mine,
You had not formed your own design
Or it had never seen the light.
It will be my vocation, too,
To build the parish church with you.

BRAND

Bethink yourself! How can we spare
That ancient, crumbling ruin there?

THE SHRIEVE

[*Looks out at it.*]

Now that the structure I behold
Outstanding in the double light
Of the new moon and snow tonight,
It looks irreparably wrecked.

BRAND

How now, shrieve?

THE SHRIEVE

Brand, it is too old.

To me it is inexplicable
That I have not before been able
Its utter ruin to detect.
Is that the main-beam bulging out?
To use it's dangerous, no doubt;
'T is likely any day to fall.
There's no style, architectural
When one views rightly roof and wall.
What's one to call those arches there?
An architect says: "Horrible!"

And I his ill opinion share.
And then the roof's moss-covered ridges!
They are not, bless me, from King Belé!
Yes, reverence can soar above all
Endurance, pass its privileges!
But every man must see and feel, he
In this worn-out, decaying hovel
Beholds an object wholly foul!

BRAND

But if the multitude should howl
In opposition to removal . . . ?

THE SHRIEVE

If none stand forward, yet will I!
On my support you may rely
With or without the mob's approval!
I shall upon some Sabbath-day
As soon or late as you may please,
Arrange all the formalities
And get things smoothly under way.
Yes, I shall speak and work and write . . .
Enough! You know the shrieve aright!
And, should I meet with much resistance,
And could I not enlist assistance
In this thick-headed populace
To tear it down, then I would rase
With my own hand . . . yea, rend it down,
Piece after piece unto the ground!
Indeed, I'll do it, I alone!
Yes, though it should require my wife
And all my daughters, by my life
It shall come down!

BRAND

That seems to me
To be a wholly different tone
From that you first tonight employed!

THE SHRIVE

The pride 't is of humanity
And of humanity alone . . .
'T is by no other thing enjoyed . . .
All things one-sided to avoid,
And if the poets do not lie,
It is not only nothing strange
But it is something lovely quite
That men's ideas can take flight . . .
In other words, opinions change.
Well, it is getting late and I
Must out and chase the gang.

[He takes up his hat.]

Good-bye!

BRAND

Chase what?

THE SHRIVE

This very day I found
A gang of gypsies, here within
The boundaries of parish ground,
A devil's crew, as foul as sin!
At them I raised a hue and cry;
Now are they safely quartered by
Your northern neighbor. But deuce take me,
If two or three did not escape me!

BRAND

The era of sweet peace came in
But lately. Does it thus begin?

THE SHRIVE

Why don't these hell-hounds stay away?
However, in a manner they
Belong unto this parish, too.

[*With a laugh.*]

Yes, in good sooth, and unto you!
Bear with me for this riddle, man,
And solve it if you will and can.
For some of these are on the earth
Because of her who gave you birth,
Yet are they hideous and base
And wholly of another race.

BRAND [*Shakes his head.*]

Oh God! One sees so much revolve
Before his eyes, he cannot solve.

THE SHRIVE

Yet easily is this one guessed.
You must have heard ere now, I know,
From some one else a word or so
About the poor boy from the west
Who more than twenty parsons knew
And who did for your mother sue . . .

BRAND

Speak on!

THE SHRIVE

Think, for a rich young lady!
She of him naturally made a

Mere byword for the neighborhood,
Just as he might have known she would!
He sighed and sorrowed thus in vain
Until he almost went insane;
And finally he made his bride
A gypsy girl. Before he died,
He did the wandering band increase
Which now camps on the mountain-side
In sin and want. Yes, one of these
Ill-gotten imps the town indeed
Still shelters as you must have heard . . .
A relic of his pretty deed.

BRAND

That is . . . ?

THE SHRIEVE

The gypsy-urchin, Gerd.

BRAND

[*Aside.*]

Ah, me!

THE SHRIEVE [*Rallying him.*]

The riddle is not hard?

His offspring cumbereth the earth
Because of her who gave you birth.
The real cause of the existence
Of this man's brat was the regard
He bore your mother.

BRAND

Tell me, shrieve:

Have you a plan to give assistance
Which would such hapless souls relieve?

THE SHRIEVE

Vain twaddle! They belong in jail!
Their hearts are given o'er to evil;
To save them were to cheat the devil,
Who, if defrauded of his own,
Would like another bankrupt fail.

BRAND

But surely you will not disown
The plans you harbored, to erect
A house the people to protect
Against the evils that are suffered
Because of poverty and want.

THE SHRIEVE

These plans, as soon as they were offered,
Their own proposer did recant.

BRAND

But if it—? 'Twas a fine idea!—

THE SHRIEVE [*With a smile.*]

The tone you now use, seems to be a
Mere trifle different from before!

[*Slaps him on the shoulder.*]

But think upon the past no more!
A man must act decidedly,
Face not the "has been" but "to be."
Farewell! I dare no longer tarry.
I must haste forth again to carry
Along the search, must try to trace
These outlaws to their hiding place.
A Merry Christmas! We shall meet

Ere long again; and kindly greet
Your wife for me!

[Exit the shrieve.]

BRAND

[After a thoughtful pause.]

On all sides rise
Numberless things to harmonize.
The thousand threads of life are tangled
In such confusion, broken, mangled—
So wrong with wrong's result is vexed,
So each contaminates the next,
That he, confused, that looks thereon,
Sees right and wrong blend into one.
*[He goes to the window and looks out for
a long time.]*

Thou sinless lamb, my little child,
Thou for my mother's sins wert slain.
A message brought a poor crack-brain,
A message from the Lord on high,
That bade me cast that fatal die;
And that poor brain was cracked again
Because my mother's soul went wild.
Thus God employs the fruits of crime
To bring forth justice in good time,
Thus from on high makes visitation
Upon a later generation!
[Draws back in terror from the window.]
The God of law rules o'er the nation.
His first command is: "Compensation!"
And in the power to sacrifice

Resides the only hope to rise.
But in our time's vocabulary
This word's intent is falsified.
Before their knowledge of this very
Matter the flock stands terrified.

[*He paces back and forth in the room.*]

To pray? To pray? Th' expression slips
So easily across the lips.

'T is common coin for each estate.

Prayer is for him who calls for grace
When summoned winds and waves to face;
Confronted by the tricks of fate,
On Jesus' load to beg a place;
Both hands aloft to heaven to raise
While knee-deep in doubt's mire he stays.
Were that the end of the affair,
Then would I, like the others, dare
To hammer at the heavenly portals
Where it is terrible for mortals
To lift their voices in God's praise.

[*He stops and muses in silence.*]

And yet, in grief's most poignant days,
In woe's mysterious, awful hour
When Alf in life's last slumber lay,
When mother's kisses lacked the power
To summon back unto his cheek
The olden smile, did I not pray?
How was it? Was I then so weak?
Whence came that inspiration sweet,
That flood of song, that melody
Which echoed far ere its retreat

And lifted me and set me free?
Then prayed I? Was I lost in prayer?
Held I with God communion there?
And did he hear me? Did He see
In that sad home my spirit's pain?
How should I know? 'T is locked again
And night once more encircles me
And nowhere is there light to find! . . .
Yes, Agnes! She can see, though blind.

[He cries out in anguish.]

Oh, Agnes, Agnes! Give me light!
Aye, give it, Agnes, if you can!

*[Agnes opens the door and enters with the
lighted Christmas candles. A warm glow
fills the room.]*

BRAND

Light! Light!

AGNES

Yes, look upon them, man,
The Christmas candles, gleaming bright!

BRAND *[Softly and aside.]*

The Christmas candles!

AGNES

[Sets the tree upon the table.]

Was I slow?

BRAND

No, no!

AGNES

How cold you have it here!
Dear heart, you must be freezing!

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BRAND

No!

AGNES [*With a smile.*]

How proud! Unwilling to appear
To know the want of warmth and light!

BRAND

[*Walking to and fro.*]

Unwilling!

AGNES

[*Talking in a low voice to herself as she walks about, decorating the room.*]

Here the tree shall stand!

Last year he with his little hand
Reached for the light in childish fun.
He was so happy, strong and bright.
He leaned forth from his little chair
And asked if it were not the sun.

[*She changes the tree's position a little.*]

Now do the Christmas candles gleam
Across—across the place out there!—
And now from where he lies asleep
My boy can catch a feeble beam—!
At least in silence he can peep
From where he lies in cold and gloom
Into the cheery Christmas room.
The pane is, as with teardrops, blurred.
Smile as you never yet have smiled!

[*She dries the window with her apron.*]

BRAND

[Has been following her with his eyes and now says in a low tone and aside.]

When will this sea of grief, so wild,
So to its deepest caverns stirred,
Be calmed as when its loved was here?
It must be calmed.

AGNES *[To herself.]*

How clear! How clear!

'T is as the intervening space
Were gone; the room stretched to embrace
The wider surface; instantly
The cold, dark earth transformed to be
An alcove where the baby rested
In blessed slumber, unmolested!

BRAND

What are you doing, Agnes?

AGNES

Hush!

BRAND *[Approaches her.]*

Why did you raise the curtain, then?

AGNES

A tempting vision—fled again!

BRAND

In dreams you into peril rush.
Replace it!

AGNES *[Beseechingly.]*

Brand!

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BRAND

Aye, shut it tight!

AGNES

Be not so cruel, 't is not right!

BRAND

Replace it!

AGNES

[Draws down the curtain.]

It is drawn; but oh,
God is not angered, I am sure,
That, while these passing dreams endure,
I drink of solace—

BRAND

God? Oh, no!

He is a judge, indulgent, mild.
You would not anger Him, my child,
If mingled in your worship, He
Found here and there idolatry!

AGNES *[Bursts into tears.]*

Then say how much is asked of me!
My feet are weary, my wings fall!

BRAND

I told you: "Cast into the sea
Each offering is that is not all!"

AGNES

Mine was; what further could there be?

BRAND *[Shakes his head.]*

It must be followed yet by many!

AGNES [*With a smile.*]
Come! Take, then, whatso'er you please!
My confidence is poverty's.

BRAND
Then give!

AGNES
Take, take! You 'll find—not any!

BRAND
You have your precious memories,
You have your grief, your longings—!

AGNES [*Desperately.*]
Aye,
'T is true! My heart's torn roots have I!
Come, tear them from me!

BRAND
To the deep
Your sacrifice you vainly toss
If you yet whimper at the loss.

AGNES [*With a shudder.*]
Your way to heaven is straight and steep.

BRAND
The will knows but the one.

AGNES
But grace's—?

BRAND
[*With a gesture of disdain.*]
Is his who first the altar raises.

AGNES .

[Gazes straight ahead and says with emotion.]

Now opens like a vast abyss
A text of scripture, which ere this,
I could not fathom—

BRAND

And it is?

AGNES

“The soul that sees Jehovah, dies!”

BRAND

[Catches her in his arms and presses her to him.]

Oh, hide thee! Open not thine eyes!
Behold him not!

AGNES

You wish it?

BRAND *[Releases her.]*

No!

AGNES

You suffer, Brand!

BRAND

I love you so.

AGNES

Your love is hard.

BRAND

Too hard, love?

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AGNES

Oh,
Ask not! I follow where you go.

BRAND

Think you that purposeless I bore you
With me, from idle dancing tore you?
That to effect a compromise
I thundered at you the command,
"Be thou prepared to sacrifice?"
Woe to us both, too great and dear
A sacrifice was offered here!
You are my wife; I dare demand
That, soul and body, you should be
A helpmate in my work for me.

AGNES

Take all! But leave me not!

BRAND

I must;
I need repose. Peace, little one!
Ere long the new church will be done.

AGNES

My smaller fane has fallen to dust.

BRAND

If 't is the temple in your breast
Where your false gods have been enshrined,
'T is for your soul's redemption best,
That it be shattered by the wind.

[He embraces her in anguish of spirit.]

All peace be with thee and through thee.
All peace be unto mine and me!

[He walks toward the side entrance.]

AGNES

Brand, may I noiselessly ajar
Dispose the window-shutter, so
The darkness will be pierced—not far—
A very little—may I?

BRAND *[Turns at the door.]*

No!

[Exit Brand into his study.]

AGNES

Closed! All closed! Oblivion even!
Bars against my very cries!
Seals, set to restrain my sighs!
Bolts, against the grave—and Heaven!
I will out; I cannot breathe,
This dread loneliness beneath.
Out? But whither? From the height
Savage eyeballs glare on me.
Can I with me in my flight
Bear my dearest property?
Did I wish it, could I flee
My heart's fearsome vacancy?

[She listens at the study door.]

Now he reads aloud; my speech
To him hath not power to reach;
Nowhere aid or consolation;
Yule-time's God has much to do,

Listening to the celebration
Offered every nation through
By the opulent and great,
Blest with children, fortunate,
Dancing, singing! Christmas is
Joy's fruition time—and His!
See me, He will not nor bother
With the moans of a lorn mother.

[*Stealthily she approaches the window.*]

Shall I ope the shutters, so
The refulgent, glowing light
May from his drear bed below
Drive the shuddering gloom of night?
Nay, he lies not there! Yule-tide
Is the children's season; he
Has been granted leave to come
Once again to his own home—
At this moment, it may be,
He is standing just outside,—
Lifting up his hand to rap
At my window-pane, mayhap.
Hearken! Was that not a cry?
Hush, Alf, hush; no help have I!
'T was your father ordered, "Close it!"
And I do not dare oppose it.
You are an obedient boy;
We ne'er crossed him, you and I.
Alf, again to heaven fly;
There are comfort, light and joy!
There in groups glad children play.
Let none see you weeping; say

Unto none, your father shut
You outside! 'T is cruel, but
Children cannot understand
What grown people have to do.
Tell them he was mourning and
That he gathered, just for you,
Pretty leaves to make your crown!
Can you see it? That was his.
[*She listens a moment, musing; then shakes
her head.*]

I am dreaming; more there is
Than mere bars between us two!
All the barriers will not down,
All the veils be rent asunder,
All that separates give way,
All barred gates fly open, till
God's announcing trumpets thunder
On the great and final day
When the purging flames distill
All things here to elements!
Oh, how much there is to do
Ere God reunite us two!
I shall toil with diligence,
Patiently, to sate the maw
Of the ever-hungry law!
Stern will I be, firm alway—
But 't is Christmas-time today,
For glad celebration meant;
From last year, how different!
Hush, to a supreme degree
Shall this Christmas honored be!

I will fetch my treasures forth,
Keepsakes more than jewels worth;
How these o'er all else I prize,
Mothers only realize!

[*She kneels at the bureau, pulls out a drawer
and takes from it a number of articles.
At that moment, Brand noiselessly opens
the door and is about to speak to her.
But, when he observes what she is doing,
he checks himself and remains silent.
Agnes does not know he is there.*]

BRAND

[*Softly.*]

Still above the grave she hovers,
Playing where death's shadow covers!

AGNES

Here 's his veil! And, tied in this,
Is his dress—how sweet it is!
[*She holds it up, beholds it and smiles.*]
Yes, and here his jacket is, in
Which we bore him forth to christen!
Oh, my boy looked lovely there,
Seated in the high church chair!
Here 's the scarf—the cape he wore
When he ventured out the door;
Then were they too big, at last
Much too little. These I put
To one side, together cast.
Mittens—stockings—what a foot!
Here we have his silken hood,
Bought lest he on raw days should
Catch a cold; 't is good as new!

Here's his travelling cloak wherein
He was wrapped with much ado,
Lest his ride should cold have been.
When the last time 't was laid by,
I had been content to die.

BRAND

[Wrings his hands in anguish.]

Spare me, Lord; I cannot rase
This last idol hiding-place!
Send another, if it be
Not a weakness, God, in me!

AGNES

It is spotted! Was I crying?
Oh, what wealth I here have lying!
Starred with pearls and crushed with pain,
Hallowed by my off'ring, wet
With mine eyes' baptismal rain,
Holy! Robe of coronation
That he wore in consecration!
Oh, how wealthy am I yet!

*[There is a sudden knock at the door.
Agnes turns with a startled cry and
catches sight of Brand. The door is
thrown open and a woman, wretchedly
clad, enters hurriedly, with a babe in her
arms.]*

THE WOMAN

[Sees the baby clothes and calls to Agnes.]
Wealthy mother, share with me!

AGNES

You are richer far than I!

THE WOMAN

You are like the rest, I see,
Quick enough with a reply!

BRAND [*Walks toward her.*]

Tell me what you here are seeking!

THE WOMAN

Sir, not you; I'd rather cast
Both of us out in the blast
Than to hear a stern priest speaking
Of my sins! Aye, run or rot
On the cliffs—or drown—what not?—
Than to hear a black priest tell
Of the broad road down to hell.
How the deuce am I to blame
That I what I am, became?

AGNES

Stay and warm yourself if cold.
If your child be hungry, it
Shall be—

THE WOMAN

Gypsies dare not sit
By your cheerful fire and bright!
For our people is the wold,
Highway, forest, hillside, height!
We must wild, unfettered roam;
Others may have house and home.
I must in a breath away;

They would have me soon at bay!
Yes, the shrieve and bailiffs would
Catch and bind me if they could!

BRAND

Here no man shall touch you.

THE WOMAN

Here?

Pent by roof and walls? The field
Doth this frosty evening yield
Better, freer atmosphere!
Clothes, though, for my baby, come!
His next brother, the mean scamp,
Did like any thief decamp
With the rags this child should wear.
Look, his limbs are nearly bare,
Cold and blue, frost-bitten, numb!

BRAND

Woman, let your child be freed
From the wild life that you lead,
Be redeemed, from sin upraised,
And the brand from him erased!—

THE WOMAN

Much you know of the affair!
Such a miracle none can
Ever compass as reclaim him—
'T is not possible for man!
War on you who did disclaim him!
Where I bore him—know you where?
'T was a filthy ditch along,
Where was drinking, ribald song;

In the slush baptized and mire,
Crossed with coals left from the fire,
Fed from spirit-flask before
From my bosom. When I bore,
Men stood 'round us two and swore.
Know you who these were? His father—
Or, indeed, his fathers, rather!

BRAND

Agnes?

AGNES

Yes.

BRAND

Is it not clear
What should be your duty here?

AGNES

Brand, to her? Oh, do not ask it!

THE WOMAN

All is welcome to my basket—
Cotton, woolen, silk or linen!
Whole or rags I'll not refuse
If 't will do to bundle him in.
Need for such will soon be by;
With thawed body let him die!

BRAND [*To Agnes.*]

You have heard the summons; choose!

THE WOMAN

You have plenty for your own;
Cannot mine, then, be allowed
Life's scant garments and a shroud?

BRAND

Heard you not in that wild tone
Ominous and strange presage?

THE WOMAN

Give, oh give!

AGNES

'T is sacrilege—
Crime against my dead!

BRAND

In vain
Alf into the grave descended,
If 't is at the threshold ended!

AGNES

[With a broken voice.]

As you will! I must again
Tread the torn and bleeding root
Of my heart beneath my foot.
Woman, I will with you share.
Take half of them!

THE WOMAN

Give me!

AGNES

There!

BRAND

What? Half only?

AGNES

Rather I
Than be robbed of all, would die!
I have yielded foot by foot,
Now I can no longer do 't!
Half's enough, she needs no more.

BRAND

Were they all too much before?

AGNES

[*Giving.*]

Woman, take this coat of his, in
Which we bore him forth to christen!
Here's his jacket, scarf and rug;
In night-air they'll keep him snug;
And here is his silken hood,
Freeze within it no child could!
Take them, hood, coat, scarf and shawl!

THE WOMAN

Give me!

BRAND

Agnes, gave you all?

AGNES

[*Gives again.*]

Here's the robe of coronation
That he wore in consecration!

THE WOMAN

Now the chest is empty. Oh,
That I were far on the way!
I will put them on below;
Then with all my pack away!

[*Exit the woman.*]

AGNES

[*Stands in violent agitation and at last asks:*]

Tell me, Brand, would it be fair
More than I have given to crave?

BRAND

Ere I answer give you, swear:
Was it willingly you gave?

AGNES

No!

BRAND

Your gift's cast in the sea
And the law's unsatisfied!

[He turns to leave her.]

AGNES

*[Remains silent until he is near the door,
then calls:]*

Brand!

BRAND

What is it?

AGNES

I have lied;

I repent and humble me!
No suspicion did you have
That not all to her I gave!

BRAND

Well?

[Takes from her bosom a folded baby-cap.]

One thing have I reserved.

BRAND

Yes?

AGNES

The cap, with tear-drops wet,
Moistened with my child's death-sweat,
Since then next my heart preserved!

BRAND

Rest in your idolatry!

[He turns to go.]

AGNES

Stay!

BRAND

What is it?

AGNES

[Reaches the cap towards him.]

Oh, you know!

BRAND

[Goes toward her and without taking the cap, demands:]

Freely?

AGNES

Freely!

BRAND

Give it me;

She yet lingers there below.

[Exit Brand with the cap.]

AGNES

There every shackle fell away
That bound my yearning soul to clay!

[For a time, she stands motionless. Little by little the expression of her face changes to beaming joy. Brand enters. She bounds to meet him, casts her arms about his neck and cries out:]

I am free, Brand, I am free!

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BRAND

Agnes!

AGNES

Night hath passed from me;
All the terrors that oppressed
Like a heavy sea my breast,
Lie beneath the outer void!
Will is victor in the fray,
Every mist hath rolled away,
Every cloud hath been destroyed!
Through the darkness of death's night
Can mine eyes glimpse morning's light.
"Churchyard, churchyard!" To mine ears
It conveys no thought of tears!
Not a wound doth it awaken;
Alf hath been to heaven taken.

BRAND

Aye, triumphant now art thou!

AGNES

Truly, surely victor now—
Victor over death am I!
Brand, look upward! There on high
I see Alf before the throne,
Happy as in days gone by,
Stretching forth his arms toward us.
Did I tongues by millions own,
If I dared and if I could,
Not a single one I would
To recover him upraise!
Oh, how wondrous rich our Lord is
In inventing means and ways!

What a sacrifice hath seemed,
Hath my soul from death redeemed!
Alf was given me to lose, . . .
From on high to victory woos!
Thanks! You led me by the hand,
Patiently for me you strove,
Struggling with your own heart's love!
Now before the choice you stand;
And on you descends the call,
The dread summons, "Nought or all!"

BRAND

Child, what do your strange words cover?
Now strife's agonies are over!

AGNES

You forget the proverb wise,
"Whoso sees Jehovah dies!"

BRAND [*Shrinks from her.*]

What a light you kindle! Woe
Unto me, if that be so!
Mighty am I; you shall stay!
All I have and am, undo;
Take all else from me away;
I will bear it—but not you!

AGNES

Choose! You at the road's fork stand!
My fate resteth in your hand!
Quench the light that in me glows,
Block the fount of Christmas joy,
Give me back my idol-clothes . . .
She's yet out there with her boy . . .

Once again my soul replace
In its blind, unseeing days.
Once more sink me in the slough
Where I laxly sinned till now.
You have power this to do;
What could I oppose to you?
Clip my wings, my soul restrain,
Hang again upon my heel
The lead-ball of mere existence!
Bind me, thrust me down again
Thither whence, with your assistance
And with Heaven's, I have risen.
You have power thus to deal,
You who rescued me from prison.
Let me dwell once more as then,
Groping, in life's darkness hid.
If you wish to do so, Brand,
And you dare, I'm yours again.
Choose! You at the road's fork stand.

BRAND

Woe betide me if I did!
Oh, but far from here and far
From where these dark memories are,
Life and light you still will find.

AGNES

Do you then forget that you
Consecration's baptisms bind?
Aye, and sacred offerings too?
And the thousand souls out there
God has given to your care?
These did you, Brand, undertake

Leading to God's promised land.
Choose! Your choice the last one is;
At the road's fork do you stand.

BRAND

Choice is none for me to make!

AGNES

[*Clasps her arms about his neck.*]

Thanks for all and thanks for this!
Faithfully your child you led.
Now death's clouds hang over me;
Linger, Brand, beside my bed!

BRAND

Sleep; your day's tasks now are done!

AGNES

Yea, and evening begun!
I am weary; victory
Did my little strength divest.
Oh, to praise God now is light!
Brand, good night!

BRAND

Good night!

AGNES

Good night!

Thanks for all! Now will I rest.

[*Exit Agnes.*]

BRAND

Soul, be steadfast! Falter never!
Triumph is all to surrender.
Loss but greater gain will render;
Only the lost are thine forever.

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ACT V.

[A year and a half later. The new church stands completed and decorated for dedication. The river runs hard by. It is early in the morning and foggy. The sacristan is busy hanging garlands in front of the church. A little later, the school-master enters.]

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Already here?

THE SACRISTAN

I must not tarry.

Come, lend a hand! These garlands carry!
They must be hung from stake to stake
Along the route the march will take.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

There by the parsonage is raised
A something, ending in a ring . . .

THE SACRISTAN

Just so, just so!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

What is the thing?

THE SACRISTAN

A scutcheon in the pastor's honor
And on a golden background traced
The name is, of the church's donor.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Yes, our poor parish sees today
A most magnificent display.
The people flock from far and near . . .
By thousands they assemble here.
The fjord is white with sails.

THE SACRISTAN

Ah, yes.

Now is the drowsy populace
At last awakened into life!
In the old pastor's day no strife
Disturbed their round of sleep and labor.
Then slept each fellow, slept his neighbor, . .
Each slumbering in dreamless rest.
I know not truly, which is best.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Life, sacristan.

THE SACRISTAN

But you and I

Untouched by all this life have kept.
What is the reason?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

This is why:

We labored while the others slept;
Now that they waken, slumber we
Since need for us there cannot be.

THE SACRISTAN

And yet you said that life was best.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

The same aver both dean and priest ;

Gainsay them will not I, at least.

But, mark you, only for the rest

Of the community 't will do.

A different law controls us two

From that which to the rest refers.

We are the district's officers.

We are to hold ourselves above it, . . .

Religion to support and science, . . .

Not make o'er sentiment ado, . . .

Shun every partisan alliance.

THE SACRISTAN

The priest is in the thickest of it.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Precisely what he should not do.

And, his superiors are, I know,

At his behavior much displeased, . . .

Would have deposed him long ago,

Had but the people's favor ceased.

But he is keen ; he smelled a rat.

He knew a trick worth ten of that ;

He builds this church. If something's done, .

They all are dazzled, every one.

Do aught . . . Their favor 't will attract.

No matter what may be the act,

Pastors and flock a deed allures ;

We were well called a race of "doers."

THE SACRISTAN

You who have been a "storthings-mand"
Must land and people understand;
But one who through the parish passed
Soon after the awakening,
Said, formerly we all were fast
Asleep, now roused and promising.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Yes, promising this people is,
Exceeding brave in promises, . . .
Grown like a weed till every Thomas
Is high interpreter of promise.

THE SACRISTAN

On this I oft have cogitated.
Tell me, since you are educated,
What is this so called public promise?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

A public promise? It were vain
To try this folly to explain
Unless all tasks were taken from us
And time no object. It must be a—
Say, rallying-point, central idea
'Round which men gather—something great
To be accomplished, soon or late—
In the land's future, don't you see?

THE SACRISTAN

Thanks for your explanation which
Leaves me with but a single hitch
Which loosened, it will all be clear.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Ask freely.

THE SACRISTAN

Could you say what year
In the land's future this will be?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

It will be—never!

THE SACRISTAN

Never?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

No!

Now can't you see that must be so!
When it is here, it will become
The present—not the future still.

THE SACRISTAN

That is correct as I can see;
No two opinions can there be,
But in such case, then when will come
The time this promise to fulfill?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

I just remarked that promises
Are contracts for the future, so
To be fulfilled in future.

THE SACRISTAN

Yes . . .

But then, the future will be . . . when?

THE SCHOOLMASTER [*Aside.*]

You are a sacristan.

[*Aloud.*]

My friend,
Must I go over it again? . . .
Over and over the subject go?
The future cannot possibly
Arrive at all; for . . . don't you see? . . .
When it has come, 't is at an end.

THE SACRISTAN

Thanks, thanks!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Behind ideas standing
Is something very much resembling
The cleverest of all dissembling.
'T is clear as crystal, notwithstanding—
That is to say, to all of those in
Whom is the sense to count a dozen.
The fact is, to a promise make
Means in the end, a promise break,
Whate'er th' intent! In man's regard
Performance ever has been hard;
Impossible it may be shown
If one at sophistry has skill.
But that tough problem leave alone
And tell me—

THE SACRISTAN

Hush!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

That was—?

THE SACRISTAN

Be still!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

I surely heard some person play
On the church organ.

THE SACRISTAN

It is he.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

The priest?

THE SACRISTAN

Precisely.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Can it be

He is so early up today?

THE SACRISTAN

I doubt if the night long his head
So much as even touched the bed.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

What? . . .

THE SACRISTAN

Never does so really.

A secret thorn torments his side
Without surcease since his wife died.
'T is true, he hides his misery
But it breaks from him here and there.
It is as if his great heart were
A vessel filled to very bursting.
Then plays he. Hark! Each tone is wild,
As if he wailed for wife and child!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

As they did sweet communion hold!

THE SACRISTAN

As one were suffering, one consoled!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

To wail with him my soul is thirsting.

THE SACRISTAN

If one were not an officer!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Yes, if one but unfettered were
By this and that consideration
Of what is proper to his station!

THE SACRISTAN

And if one dared pursue his way,
Unmoved by what the world might say!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Could one forget he must look wise, . . .
Unbend and dare to sympathize!

THE SACRISTAN

Friend, let us do so! None is near!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

It were unseemly to degrade
Ourselves to common mortals' sphere.
No person should, the parson said,
Try two things at a time to be;
Such conduct's contradictory.
No one will score success, howe'er he
May try, as man and functionary.
All should, each in his own estate,
Our shrieve's example imitate.

THE SACRISTAN

In what way?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Do you not remember
The conflagration at which he
The archives carried forth, unspoiled,
And saved them?

THE SACRISTAN

Yes, 't was in December . . .

THE SCHOOLMASTER

A stormy night! He fought and toiled,
Seemed everywhere at once to be
And to possess ten lives or more.
Saint Nick stood near him with a sneer.
And, when she saw his plight, his wife
Cried: "Save your soul, O husband dear!
The devil seeks to take your life!"
Then through the leaping flame he swore:
"My soul? To hell with it, I say!
Just help me get these books away!"
He is shrieve, outside and in,
From top to toe, from core to skin, . . .
Is headed certainly toward
Where he will get his just reward.

THE SACRISTAN

And where is that?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Of course it lies
In the good sheriffs' paradise.

THE SACRISTAN

My wise friend . . . !

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Well?

THE SACRISTAN

It seems to me

That, back of what you say, I see
The shadow of an indication
Of just this period's fermentation.
It is fermenting, that is clear;
So easy is it to descry
From the subsiding reverence here
Shown usages of times gone by.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

That must unto the ground decay,
Disintegrate, return to clay.
The rotten doth the fragrant nourish;
On ordure do sweet roses flourish.
Consumption undermines the chest
Of this gaunt race; if all its straining
Cannot dislodge it from its breast,
Death is the only choice remaining.
Yes, 't is fermenting, that is plain.
One needs not, that to ascertain,
A microscope; for on the day
The old church fell, it seemed to me
As if all things had passed away
Wherein until that moment we
Were rooted and whereon we stood.

THE SACRISTAN

Silence fell on the multitude.
"Down with it!" was at first the shout,
But at the last that cry died out
And many hid them in the swarm,
With ears uncomfortably warm,
With thoughtful brows and eyes downcast
When in dead earnest came at last
The moment for the church to fall.
They thought it was invincible.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

They felt a thousand ties had knit
Their reverent spirits unto it
Until the arches of the new one
Arose where they had viewed the ruin.
Hence, with mixed dread and expectation,
They viewed the fall and alteration.
Their souls looked forward to the time
When the old battle-flag should fall
And the new colors float o'er all.
The loftier the spire did climb,
The paler and more silent, they!
And now? The time is up today.

THE SACRISTAN

[Points to one side.]

Behold the people! Hither swarm
Men, women, children—

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Thousands! Yea,
How still it is!

THE SACRISTAN

Yet, warningly
It seems to rumble, in the way
The ocean rumbleth ere a storm.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

That is the soul-stirred people's sighs.
It is as if some witchery
Had just unsealed their sleep-bound eyes
And brought their souls to realize,
The hour's momentous. They view this
As if they met in convocation
To judge what god should rule the nation.
But tell me where the pastor is!
I'm stifling and I wish I were
Out of men's sight and far from here.

THE SACRISTAN

I, too!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

In seasons such as these
One cannot fathom his own seas.
Each depth, determined, doth disclose
Another, deeper than he knows.
He wills, withdraws, would on again . . .

THE SACRISTAN

My friend!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Well?

THE SACRISTAN

H'm!

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THE SCHOOLMASTER

Why hesitate?

THE SACRISTAN

I . . . Don't you think we sympathize?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Indeed, not I, sir!

THE SACRISTAN

I, likewise!

One witness can no man condemn.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

We are not silly girls, but men.

Good morning, sir, my pupils wait.

[*Exit the Schoolmaster.*]

THE SACRISTAN

I gazed, fool-like, on visions vain.

Now am I cool and calm again,

Have no desire once more to look,

Am clasped together like a book.

Well, to my work, then, with a will!

I at this special place am through;

And "Satan finds some mischief still"

They say, "for idle hands to do."

[*Exit the sacristan in the opposite direction.*

The organ, which has been playing softly, suddenly breaks forth into loud swells and closes with an ear-splitting, discordant shriek. Immediately afterward, Brand enters from the church.]

BRAND

Nay, the tone I cannot bring
Full and resonant to speak;
Where the instrument should sing,
It doth but emit a shriek!
Roofs and arches, pillars, walls—
Each upon the other falls,
So it seems—together come
On all sides and overhead
Like a coffin on the dead,
Rendering the music dumb!
Every means that man employs,
Tried I; it has lost its voice.
Did I lift in prayer mine own?
Spent and broken, it fell back
In a hollow-chested moan,
Like a rusty bell's, and cracked.
'T was as if the Lord were standing
In the choir, enthroned, commanding,
Gesturing in indignation,
Waving off my invocation!
"Great the Lord's house shall be made"
In mad confidence I said;
I had courage in those days
To demolish, level, rase.
Now the work completed stands;
Now they cross themselves and cry,
With devoutly folded hands,
"Lo, how great! How grand! How high!"
Is it that they better know
Or myself who see not so?

Is it truly grand? Or great?
To my dreams commensurate?
Does the finished structure sate
The divine anticipation
Wherefrom the design had birth?
Is it like the soul-creation,
Like the temple I saw rise,
Arching over the whole earth?
Oh, if Agnes had not died,
All might now be otherwise!
Great in small things she descried;
She could smile doubt's woe from me;
She could make the heavens appear
Compassing the earth as near
As the foliage the tree.

[He observes the preparation for the celebration.]

Boughs and banners! And the school
Practising upon its song!
All the grounds will soon be full;
They will honor me ere long
As they file in order past me.
Now they hoist my name in gold.
Father, grant me light, or cast me
Fathoms deep beneath the mould!
The performances begin
In the hour. "The priest" is in
Every thought of them; and sung
Like a chorus by each tongue.
What they think, ere it is said,
I can feel upon me burn;

All their panegyrics turn
Into ice about my head,
As by magic! Oh, that I
Ere they found me, ere they found me,
Could but cast oblivion 'round me,
To some wild beast's den could fly!
[*Enters the shrieve in full uniform. Beaming with joy, he greets Brand.*]

THE SHRIEVE

Now really at last is born
This glorious, triumphant morn!
Six days of labor, one of ease!
The sails we lower of our boat
And hoist above us to the breeze
Our Sabbath banner, while we float,
Scarce moving, with the stream along . . .
Find all things good and nothing wrong.
Hail to you, generous, noble Brand!
Your fame will soon ring through the land.
Hail to you! At this demonstration
Myself am touched and happy, too,
Because of your success. But you . . . ?

BRAND

Am suffocating.

THE SHRIEVE

The sensation
Must be kept down! So must you preach
That through all corners it will thunder, . . .
Must to your congregation reach
A beaker, flowing to the brim.

Such resonance! All I have seen,
Have over it expressed their wonder
And praise . . .

BRAND
Indeed?

THE SHRIEVE
The very dean,
When I was looking through with him,
Admired it. Yes, he praised it highly.
"In all the work, what graceful style!" he
Cried, "What majesty there is
In arch and column" . . .

BRAND
You saw this?

THE SHRIEVE
Saw what?

BRAND
That great it seemed to be?

THE SHRIEVE
It is; it does not merely seem,—
Whether from far or near you see
It towering—

BRAND
Truly? Do you deem . . . ?

THE SHRIEVE
By all that 's holy, it is so.
Too great entirely for a race
Up north so far . . . quite out of place.
In other regions, as we know,

It might be quite another thing.
But here, where men can scarcely wring
A living from the sterile ground
Between the sea and rocky range,
It is so great as to astound!

BRAND

In other words, we but exchange
A worn-out falsehood for a new.

THE SHRIEVE

What now?

BRAND

We manage that the heart
Of the parishioners depart
From the old, mouldy shelter to
The modern spire there in the blue.
Then bawled the choir, "How venerable!"
And now it bellows, "Lo, how grand!"
It is a seventh wonder and
To find its equal none is able."

THE SHRIEVE

My good friend, I shall to it stick:
The man must be a lunatic
Who could require a bigger one!

BRAND

But, after all is said and done,
It must be rendered clear to all:
This church, just as it stands, is small!
To seek to hide it, were to lie.

THE SHRIEVE

Nay, hear me! Pass such crotchets by!
What profits it, that to deride

On which one has his labor spent?
The people all are satisfied, . . .
Deem it so rich and excellent, . . .
Aught so magnificent saw never!
Oh, let them think so, then, forever!
Why should we bother with the wretches
And with our flaming torches scare . . .
Especially when splendor fetches
Nothing for which they wish or care?
A thing is as one thinks of it;
It would not matter, not a whit,
If now the church were scarcely fit
To shelter mangy dogs in it,
If but the populace, deceived,
Unhesitatingly believed
It was a glorious temple, Brand,
A thing beyond all equal grand.

BRAND

In everything that self-same creed!

THE SHRIEVE

Besides, this is a holiday;
Each is your guest, too, in a way.
'T were an inhospitable deed,
Did we here no precaution take
To turn the best side to their eyes;
And principally for your sake
It would be most absurd today
Upon the painful point to play
Of the new church's real size.

BRAND

How so?

THE SHRIEVE

The reasons will content you.
First, that our council has decided
A silver goblet to present you;
And its inscription would not do,
Were the new church's size derided.
The song too, as they give the cup,
And the short speech which I deliver—
Why, they will both be ruined, too,
If we, by order of the giver,
The grandeur of the gift must skip.
Therefore, keep a stiff upper-lip!
That nonsense must be given up!

BRAND

I see what oft offends mine eyes,
You liars celebrating lies!

THE SHRIEVE

Merciful heavens! Bless us, friend,
Such strong expressions! What is meant?
But now, to bring it to an end,
Hear this, my second argument!
As that was silver, this is gold.
Know, then, the higher powers hold
You favored over all the fold,
Loved and esteemed of all the nation—
In short, have planned a decoration.
You will today lead all the rest
With the proud cross upon your breast.

BRAND

Beneath a heavier cross already

I groan; if any one is ready,
Then let him take it from me!

THE SHRIEVE

What?

Brand, can it be that you are not
Especially elated at
A mark of honor, such as that?
You are a riddle to the core.
For God's sake, think of—!

BRAND [*Stamps his foot.*]

What you say

Is vapid nonsense, thrown away!
I leave, no wiser than before,
Have learned no part of what I sought.
You tell me nothing, have not caught
The faintest lineament of what
Lay back of that I tried to say.
The grandeur which I meant, was not
Mere size which can be measured by
A yardstick. It was that which chills
And yet with fire the spirit fills, . . .
Which in some occult manner gleams,
Alluring us to restful dreams,
Which lifts one like the starlit sky
And . . . Leave me, leave me! I am weak.
Say on, but to the others speak!

[*Exit Brand into the church.*]

THE SHRIEVE [*To himself.*]

Who can, in such a muddle, get
Himself to rights? "A grandeur," set

In something that "occultly beams"
Nor "can be measured!" "Restful dreams"
And "starlit sky!" Such bosh he said!
H'm! Perhaps, he has not breakfasted.

[Exit the shrieve.]

BRAND *[Re-enters.]*

Ne'er on the mountain, bleak and drear,
Have I been so forlorn and lonely,
So utterly alone as here!
My questions do they answer only
By cackle, twitter, grunt or squeal!

[He gazes after the departing shrieve.]

How could I crush him 'neath my heel!
Whenever that I seek to raise
His thought above mere tricks and lies,
He, his putrescent soul displays,
Vomits it forth before mine eyes!
Oh, Agnes, why wert thou too slight?
I weary of this bootless play
Where none is victor, none gives way.
Hopeless, indeed, is a lone knight!

[Enters the dean.]

THE DEAN

"Oh, my belovèd! Oh, my flock!"
Excuse me! What was it I said?
"My brother-clergyman!" I mean.
This mad, intoxicating scene
To splinters one's ideas knock;
My sermon has gone to my head.
I memorized it yesterday,

So at my tongue's end 't is today.
Enough! Take my congratulation,
You who so nobly broke the ice,
Who forged ahead with enterprise
And let the numskulls howl and bawl,—
Tore down what well deserved to fall
And built a grand, new church, instead,
That challenges our admiration!

BRAND

Far from it!

THE DEAN

What was that you said?
Doth aught remain but dedication?

BRAND

Into the new house must be brought
A soul regenerate, and thought
Shrived clean from earth's contamination.

THE DEAN

Oh, that, of course, is understood!
Such noble arches of carved wood,
Such spacious aisles are calculated
To make one's soul regenerated!
That resonance, so lovely, too,
Which of each word you preach, makes two,
Must the good people's faith increase
Fully a hundred per cent apiece!
Of all that richer states present,
Aught finer scarcely have I known,
Than this, your great accomplishment—
For all we owe to you alone!

Accept, then, from a brother priest
My most sincere congratulation
Which, I assure you, at the feast
This day set for the celebration
Held in your honor, is to be
Followed by many a wing'd oration
From younger of the deanery.
But wherefore do you look so pale?

BRAND

Too long did strength and courage fail!

THE DEAN

Of course! So much to superintend
And all without support or aid;
But now the worst is at an end.
All things presage a glorious day.
'T will pass away, be not afraid!
They flock from districts far away
By thousands to proclaim your glory.
Yourself examine and declare,
Where is the man who can compare
With you in gifts of oratory?
With open arms your brothers of
The ministry receive you and
The hearts of all our people, Brand,
Are filled with gratitude and love.
The church, for which we long have waited,
Stands there, your monument, and all
So beautifully decorated.
The text, how elevating, noble!
The feast, too—I was now inside

The parsonage, saw them divide
A calf, a toothsome animal!
I promise, with no little trouble
Was so select a fatling found
In these hard times when, as you know,
Good meat sells at nine pence the pound.
But, for the present, let that go;
Another errand brought me here.

BRAND

Say on! Rip open! Gash! Pierce! Rend!

THE DEAN [*With a smile.*]

My method's somewhat gentler, friend.
But to the point; our time is dear!
There is a trifling thing which you
Without delay should rectify.
'T will not be difficult to do.
Indeed, I fancy you could guess
At what I'm aiming, did you try.
What I shall say, has reference to
Your own official duty. You
Have often put too little stress
On custom, which comes first in truth.
Well, well! I will not scold; a youth,
New to it all, but lately down
From the brisk atmosphere of town,
One can't expect to understand
Just how things in the country stand.
But it is now important quite,
We get the matter set aright.
So, heretofore too much you have
Addressed the individual's need;

That error is, between us, grave.
Weigh them only in the mass!
Use one comb for all the class!
You'll not regret it, Brand, indeed!

BRAND

Explain your meaning!

THE DEAN

You shall hear it.
You built here for the public good
This church, a vestment for the spirit
Of law and order and of peace;
For in religion the state sees
The power, be it understood,
Which checks and softens men—in short
The bulwark of morality.
Lean is the Nation's treasury;
She must have value of some sort
For every farthing she expends.
"Good Christians" means "good citizens."
Think you the state would spend her hoard
Just for the people and the Lord?
Such, statesmen foolishness would call;
And, Brand, the livings of us all
Would very soon be at an end
If but the State did not delight
To keep our interests in sight.
The State's own purposes, my friend,
Through us, her officers, she gains—
Her priests, in good sooth might I say!

BRAND

Each word is wisdom. Speak, I pray!

THE DEAN

But little to be said remains.
This church you have presented to
The State, and consequently you
Must all your energies devote
Her power and influence to promote.
'T is in that spirit that I view
The ceremonies, now at hand;
The bells peal in that spirit, Brand,—
The letter of donation, too.
A promise follows with the gift;
You its significance should sift—

BRAND

God knows it was not so intended.

THE DEAN

'T is now too late, the thing is ended.

BRAND

Too late? 'T is ended? We shall see.

THE DEAN

Be reasonable! Such a shout
Sounds wholly ludicrous to me!
What is there here to howl about?
To nothing evil you agree.
You can as well each soul preserve
The while the State you likewise serve.
The business of two masters you
Can with no inconvenience do
If you will prudently behave.
You were not made a priest to save
Peter or Paul from punishment.

Your consecration rather meant
That through you all the populace
Have access to the fount of grace.
But that the flock is saved implies
That each, whatever be his station,
Has his due portion of salvation.
You do not seem to recognize
The fact that, nowadays, the State
Is in a manner democratic.
I grant you freely that its hate
Of liberty is most emphatic.
Equality it favors, though.
You never help to hold men so
But make them different, in new
And most peculiar manners, too.
Each one a member was, before,
But now an individual; that
Is not good service of the state,
And one result is, we are late
This year in gathering tithes and all
The other taxes communal—
Because the church is now the hat
Which fits all persons' heads, no more.

BRAND

Oh, what a prospect opens to me!

THE DEAN

There's nothing gained by being gloomy;
And yet I cannot but deplore,
Such sway doth disaffection hold
That it is shocking to behold.
But there is hope while life remains.

This fact my confidence sustains :
By your most generous donation
You have your duties but increased ;
You are to labor here as priest,
With this, your hostage to the nation.
All things must be beneath control ;
For otherwise the energies
Would, like a wanton, unchecked foal,
O'erleap all custom's boundaries.
And, be it understood, the same
Strict law, whatever be its name,
Doth in all sorts of order rule.
In art, they christen it the "school ;"
"To keep step" it is called, so far
As I the words recall, in war.
Yes, that is the expression, friend ;
The same, too, doth the State intend.
Quickstep it finds too fast a pace ;
'T is steady marching wins the race.
Instead, let all the feet keep time
With equal step, like rhythm and rhyme.
That is the model we should follow.

BRAND

True, true ! The eagles are to wallow
With scavengers in every gutter,
While geese are dizzily to flutter
In heaven's illimitable halls.

THE DEAN

Thank God, we're not mere animals !
But, if you would resort to fable,
'T is best we to the Bible turn ;

For lessons it will have us learn
 On every subject and is full
 From Genesis to Revelation
 Of every sort of parable.
 At present, I will but refer
 To the projected tower of Babel.
 Think you that they successful were?
 Why not? An easy explanation:
 Because they did not keep in line,
 Each one his separate language spoke—
 They pulled not squarely on the yoke,—
 Were individuals, in fine.
 This is one-half the lesson told
 By this wise parable of old.
 How true that proverb is of all;
 "United, stand; divided, fall!"
 Whom God designs to overthrow,
 He singles out before the blow.
 The Romans said this, in their own
 Wise adage: "Whom the gods designed
 To overthrow, they first made blind"—
 That is, they took away his mind.
 The same means "crazy" and "alone;"
 Hence every solitary man
 Must in the end expect the fate
 Which did the bold Uriah wait
 When David placed him in the van.

BRAND

Quite possibly, but if so be,
 In death no overthrow I see.
 And are you certain that, combined

In language, effort, purpose, mind,
The most presumptuous men of Babel
Would in the end have proven able
To build their impious tower through
The circling vault of Heaven's blue?

THE DEAN

No, that's the point; no struggling wight
Ever attains to Heaven . . . quite.
That, too, is half the lesson told
By that wise parable of old,
That all men's works are doomed to fall
Which unto Heaven's heights aspire.

BRAND

Yet Jacob's ladder scaled the wall
And thither climbs the soul's desire.

THE DEAN

In that sense, true! Preserve us, Lord,
No argument is needed there,
For Heaven, of course, is the reward
Of righteous living, faith and prayer;
But life is one thing, faith another
And, if you blend one with the other,
You cannot fail to injure both.
Six days for labor are directed;
The seventh, the heart may be affected;
If now the church were going all
The seven days, then by my troth
Which day would you the Sabbath call?
The incense of purification,
If not enjoyed in moderation,

You will most certainly impair.
Like art, religion must not be
Too much exposed unto the air.
Yet, in a sense, you still are free;
At the ideal you may look
With safety from that sheltered nook,
The pulpit, with your vestments on.
When they are off, let it be gone
And of your fairy dreams have done
Ere out you venture in the sun.
In all things there's a regulation
Demanding stringent limitation,
As I have told you; and for this,
To give it proper emphasis,
I sought this chance to talk with you.

BRAND

One thing is very clear to me.
It is that I will never do
As guardian of this treasury
For the community.

THE DEAN

You would
As perfectly as any could,
In a capacity much higher . . .
Much higher . . .

BRAND

'T is not managed by
Myself defiling in the mire.

THE DEAN

You evidently overlook
That who is humbled, shall, my friend,

Exalted be. The staff must bend
Before it answers for a crook.

BRAND

A man to be of use must die.

THE DEAN

Good Heavens! Can you think that I
Mean aught so dreadful?

BRAND

Yes, indeed!

That is essential. First, be bled!
For, of a truth, it takes a dead
And fleshless skeleton to suit
The pallid, jaundiced life you lead.

THE DEAN

God knows, I would not bleed a brute . . .
A cat . . . far less, a man like you!
I merely thought it would not do
You any harm to set the door
A bit ajar through which before
I issued forth and up and on
And all my churchly honors won.

BRAND

What you are asking, do you know?
That I, upon the state's cock-crow,
Shall the ideal disavow
For which alone I've lived till now.

THE DEAN

What? Disavow? Who asks it? I
Have nothing asked you to deny.

I did but indicate the plain,
Clear duty, that you should contain
Within you, prudently concealed,
What others cannot utilize.
Preserve it all if all you prize,
But kept hermetically sealed.
Soar, man, unto your heart's content . . .
That is to say, soar inwardly
But not before men, publicly!
Believe me, Brand, that soon or late
To be so set and obdurate
Will bring its certain punishment.

BRAND

Yes! Fear of vengeance, hope of gain
Are on your brow, the brand of Cain,
Which says that, wordly-cunning, you
Your bosom's spotless Abel slew!

THE DEAN

[*Aside.*]

He not alone my aid refuses
But my position sets at nought
For the familiar "du" he uses.
It is too much!

[*Aloud.*]

Sir, I will not
The strife prolong; but must once more
Beg to remind you, as before,
That, if you would advance, you ought
Ever to bear in mind in what
Country and age we live; for none
Is like fame's laurels to have won

Or have been victor in the fray
If his own time oppose his way.
Dares artist, poet, prophet, sage
Thus disregard his land and age?
Our soldiers, likewise? "Keen-edged
swords"

Are now but legendary words.
And why? Because of the command,
"Heed the requirements of the land!"
His individuality
A man must rigidly restrain,
Must not above the people fly,
Must not beyond the people pass,
Must hide himself within the mass.
"The times," the shrieve says, "are humane."
And, if you would that tone adopt,
You might be something great one day;
But all your stern airs must be dropped,
All your sharp corners rubbed away,
And all your thorny edges lopped.
You, like the others, must be sleek
And ways unusual never seek
To follow, if 't is your intent
To have your work be permanent.

BRAND

I will away!

THE DEAN

Most surely so!

A man like you must, soon or late,
To wider fields of labor go.
To be successful, though, in great

Societies, just as in small,
The age must be considered, Brand,—
The time must by a corporal,
With his walking-stick in hand,
Be pounded into one and all.
Th' ideal leader of this age
Is not the hero, bard or sage
But corporal, and, as proceed
His men to church by companies,
The priest should in like manner lead
To paradise by parishes.
'T is all so easy; faith is grounded
Upon authority, you know;
And, as that is on learning founded,
Most confidently and devoted,
Where it may lead us, we may go;
And how faith is to be promoted,
By rules and ritual is directed.
So, brother, be not too dejected!
'Time is required for meditation.
'Consider well the situation
And for the outcome have no fear.
I will step in the church and try
To pitch my voice a little high;
We have few resonances here.
Farewell, I mean to preach about
Our human nature's fall and how
God's image is almost rubbed out;
But it is time for luncheon now.

[*Exit the dean.*]

BRAND

[Stands for a moment, musing and as if turned to stone.]

I for my mission offered all,
For God's as I in blindness thought.
Now doth dawn's trump from slumber
call—

Shows for what spirit I have wrought.
Not yet, not yet! Ye have me not!
Blood for its maw yon churchyard got;
Of life and light I gave the whole;
They shall not with it take my soul!
Oh, terrible to stand alone,
Where'er I turn, to see death's head!
Oh, terrible to get a stone
When such my hunger is for bread!
How true the deadly words he spake,
And, likewise, what a gulf they make
Beneath me and upon all sides!
And yet God's dove of guidance hides;
Never upon me hath it rested!
If one devout believer came,
And my soul with his firm faith vested!
[Enter Ejnar, pale, emaciated, clad in black, walking along the road. He stops on seeing Brand.]

BRAND

[Cries out.]

You, Ejnar?

EJNAR

Yes, that is my name.

BRAND

Just now I thirsted after one
Whose heart was not of wood or stone;
Come, let me press you to my breast!

EJNAR

No need, my spirit hath found rest.

BRAND

You surely hold not anger yet
For what took place when last we met?

EJNAR

No, enmity I do not hold;
At fault you were not. I behold
In you th' unconscious instrument
Which in His Providence God sent
While wildly the broad road I trod,
Me from sin's bondage to release
And turn my truant soul to God!

BRAND [*Draws back.*]

What words are these?

EJNAR

The words of peace,
The words one learns when he is torn
From sin's enchantment and reborn.

BRAND

Remarkable! If not mistaken,
I was informed that you had taken
To ways quite different . . .

EJNAR

Seduced

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By pride and faith in mine own power,
The deities the world is used
To worship, idols of the hour,
The talent they ascribed to me . . .
My voice, too . . . all were sirens fair
To draw me into Satan's snare.
But praise be unto God, that He
His ailing lamb did not forsake!
Compassion on me did He take
When it was needed.

BRAND

In what way?

EJNAR

I fell.

BRAND

You fell?

EJNAR

To drink and play;
Unto such depths He had me fall.

BRAND

Such things, God's doings do you call?

EJNAR

They were the first step to salvation.
Next did He take my health from me;
I lost my talent utterly
And lost with it all inclination
For revelry and merriment.
I to a hospital was sent,
Long lay there ill, as if afire,
And thought my painful, straining eyes

Saw millions of gigantic flies
And other monsters full as dire.
When I came out, I chanced to meet
Three pious sisters on the street
And they, with a divine, did win
My spirit from the toils of sin,—
Released me from the yoke of earth
And through regenerative birth
Made me a child of God.

BRAND

Indeed!

EJNAR

The roads are various, different;
One doth along the valley lead,
One clammers up the steep ascent.

BRAND

Since then?

EJNAR

Since then? Just so, just so!

I first, then, if you have to know,
A temperance advocate became;
But oftentimes that avocation
Was fraught with overmuch temptation.
I chose another, with the aim
To shun what I could not withstand
And now go as a missionary.

BRAND

To whom?

EJNAR

To Halè-negro-land.

We're wasting precious moments, and
My time is dear . . .

BRAND

You will not tarry?
We have a festival today.

EJNAR

No, thank you! No! I must away!
The black souls are awaiting me.
Farewell!

[He starts to go.]

BRAND

Does not your memory
Detain you, bid you to inquire . . . ?

EJNAR

Of what?

BRAND

Of her who would lament
To find you now so different,—
Would sorrow at a change so dire.

EJNAR

I understand you now; you mean
The fair young girl who once held me
In worldly joy's captivity
Before in faith I was washed clean.
How is it with her?

BRAND

We were wed
Before another year went by.

EJNAR

'T is unimportant; with such I

[251]

Decline to trouble my poor head.
Th' important only would I know.

BRAND

The time we did together live
Was rich with blessings on each side,
With joy and sorrow. Our child died . . .

EJNAR

Yet unimportant.

BRAND

Even so:

Him God did rather lend than give
And one day we shall meet again.
But she herself has gone since then;
There you their resting-place may view.

EJNAR

Still unimportant.

BRAND

What? That, too?

EJNAR

Such things I ask not of; beside
The question's all which you have spoken.
But tell me, only, how she died.

BRAND

Died? Hoping for a morning bright,
With all her heart's rich store unbroken,
With will unyielding through death's night,
With gratitude for all life gave
And took, she sank into her grave.

EJNAR

Such words as these are idle play;

There, at the threshold of the tomb,
How stood her faith?

BRAND

Unmoved!

EJNAR

In whom?

BRAND

In God!

EJNAR

Alas! In Him alone?

Then she is lost!

BRAND

What did you say?

EJNAR

She 's damned, of course!

BRAND

[*Placidly.*]

I might have known . . .

Wretch, go your way!

EJNAR

The devil you

Will soon get in his clutches, too;

Yes, you as certainly as she,

Will one day die eternally.

BRAND

You dare to damn men to hell-fire?

But now you wallowed in the mire!

EJNAR

On me doth not a spot remain

For in faith's waters I have been

Washed clean of every trace of sin;
Of crime and vice hath every stain
On holiness's board been scrubbed
Till off hath every taint been rubbed.
Original sin I cleansed away
By using the pounder: "Watch and pray!"
Now, as a surplice, white am I
By virtue of prayer's washing-lye.

BRAND

Pooh!

EJNAR

Pooh to you, here is the smell
Of brimstone and the prince of hell
Shows me a glimpse of cloven feet!
For Heaven's uses I am wheat
While you are chaff, condemned to be
Cast to the burning utterly.

[*Exit Ejnar.*]

BRAND

[*Looks after him for a moment. Then suddenly his eyes brighten and he exclaims:*]

Such the man I seemed to crave!
From delusion I am free;
Over me my flag shall wave,
Though not one shall follow me.

THE SHRIEVE [*Enters hastily.*]

Haste, beloved sire! They need
But your signal to proceed.

BRAND

Let them come!

THE SHRIEVE

Without you? No!

Do not waste a moment! Go!
Else the people will not wait
But will, like a torrent rushing,
One against the other pushing,
Pour themselves about your gate,
Crying: "Let the priest come out!"
Hark, already do they shout!
Hurry, hurry; for I fear
They will make a riot here.

BRAND

Never will I stoop to hide
In your rabble; here I stay.

THE SHRIEVE

Are you crazy, Brand?

BRAND

Your way
Is too narrow for my stride.

THE SHRIEVE

'T will be none the wider when
'T is more densely packed with men.
Look, they crowd the priests and dean
To the brink of the ravine!
Come, good pastor, now it eases;
Use with them your influence!
Ah, too late, they burst the fence;
The procession goes to pieces!
[*The multitude streams in, pushing in wild
disorder through the lines of the proces-
sion, to the church.*]

SEVERAL VOICES

Priest!

OTHERS

[*Point to the church steps where Brand is standing, and shout:*]

There stands he!

YET OTHER VOICES

Signal give
To commence the marching!

THE DEAN

Shrieve,
Keep them back!

THE SHRIEVE

They will not be
Checked by my authority!

THE SCHOOLMASTER [*To Brand.*]

Speak and let the truth be seen!
We are doubting, every one:
Is it something great or mean,
This strange something we have done?

BRAND

An awakening current flows
Through the people's dull repose;
At the road's fork, men, stand you!
You must wholly will the new,
Break from all corrupt deeds' power,
Ere the spirit's church will tower
As it must and as it ought!

OFFICERS

He is raving!

PRIESTS
He is mad!

BRAND
Raving was I when I thought
You the least intention had
Of in spirit and in truth
Serving God. I was, forsooth,
Somewhat flighty in my mind
When I fancied I could bind
You to Him by trickery.
I considered, cowardly,
"The old church is far too small;
Twice as big—that will suffice!
Five times—more can't be desired!"
Fool, I saw not it required,
Here as ever, "nought or all!"
Down the path of compromise
Trod I, reeling, lurch by lurch!
But today God spake with power
And He hath this very hour
Doom pronounced upon this church!
Oh, I held my breath for dread,
Dumb with terror at the sight,
Carried off my feet with fright,
Crushed like David, facing Nathan!
Now my every doubt is dead:
Compromise's soul is—Satan!

THE MULTITUDE
[*With growing excitement.*]
Down with them who blinded us,
Who our spirits' marrow stole!

BRAND

The foul foe within you was
That put fetters on each soul!
With your talents trafficked you,
Split your very selves in two;
Loss of power follows close
With its hollowness and woes!
With this church what would you do?
But the show appeals to you,
But the organ, bells—desire
That the sermon should inspire,
As 't is lisped and whistled, flows
Thunders, hails, in fury blows,—
Following the latest rules
Of the oratory schools.

THE DEAN

[*Aside.*]

That the sheriff's fustian means!

THE SHRIEVE

[*Aside.*]

That hits twaddle like the dean's!

BRAND

But the outer guise you see,
The lit candles of the mass;
Sodden, then you homeward pass
To brute toil and drudgery.
Souls put on their common clothes
As do bodies and 'neath those
You wear Sundays, lies the Book
Into which you never look
Ere the Sabbath comes again.
Oh, it was not thus I dreamt it

When the bitter cup I emptied;
I would build a temple, then,
That should shelter . . . not mere creed . . .
Not mere faith . . . but life and deed,
Since that God alone can give
You the privilege to live . . .
Shelter daily toil for bread,
Night's repose and midnight dread,
The fresh joys of hot-blood youth,
All things poor or grand in truth,
That man's bosom properly
Holds within, its own to be! . . .
The stream's purling and its crashing,
From the cliff's edge wildly dashing;
Thunder from the storm-cloud's lungs;
Murmur of the restless sea;
These subdued and blent should be
Mingled with the organ's tone
And the songs of thousand tongues!
Down with what hath here been done!
'T is but fabled to be great;
'T is not truly so at all
But a ruin near to fall,
To weak wills appropriate!
To suppress your souls you seek
By dividing work from play.
For six days of every week
God's flag on the deck is lying;
Only on the seventh day
Is it seen, toward Heaven flying!

VOICES FROM THE MULTITUDE
Lead us, for the storm cloud lowers!
Lead us, and the victory's ours!

THE DEAN
Hear him not, good people; he
Lacks the faith which ought to be
A true Christian's!

BRAND
That is true;
The disease then mentioned you
That afflicts and plagues this whole
Earth-bound people which now lies
In doubt's mire up to its eyes;
Faith is held by souls alone!
Show me one who is a soul;
Show me one who has not thrown
To the dogs his nobler part,
The brave spirit, generous heart,
In his groping, stumbling haste!
Through the rioting of pleasure,
'Neath the juggler's trancing measure,
For true joy you lost the taste;
With the ark the dance you tread,
Only when all else hath fled,
Powers gone and strength used up,
At the limit of your rope!
When you've drained th' indulgent cup,
Emptied it to the last drop
And, perforce, you have to stop,
Then arrives the time to hope,
To repent, lament and pray,

When your life is spent away.
When God's imprint you erase,
Make yourselves all animal,
You besiege the throne of grace;
God's realm do you only seek
As faint invalids and weak.
Therefore must this kingdom fall!
What gains He to have about,
Ailing souls, diseased, worn-out?
Did He not with power declare
That He chose man for His heir,
When the warm blood-currents roll
Through the arteries of the soul?
Only as children, can you win
His fair realm, not hobble in!
Come, then, grandchild and grandfather,
Youth and maiden, man and wife,
In a child-like spirit gather
Into the great church of life!

THE SHRIEVE

Open it, then!

THE MULTITUDE

[Cries as if in pain.]

No! Not this!

BRAND

Unto it no limit is;
Greensward, meadow, field and moor,
Fjord and ocean are its floor;
And its spreading vault naught can,
Save th' unbounded heavens, span!
There shall all your work be done,

There be seen of every one!
There your week's work can you face
And yet break not holy days.
It shall all things' garment be
As the bark contains the tree.
Life and creed will it unite,
Square man's conduct with the right.
There shall daily labor be
Like soul-flight in heaven's expanse,
Children's sport 'neath the Yule-tree
Or King David in his dance!

*[There passes a breeze, as it were, through
the multitude. Some draw back. Most
of them throng closely together about
Brand.]*

A THOUSAND VOICES

God's light through the darkness breaks;
Life itself man's worship makes!

THE DEAN

Haste, he'll leave us not a man!
Bailiff! Clerk! Shrieve! Sacristan!

THE SHRIEVE

[In an undertone.]

Heavens, bellow not so, friend!
Surely you are not the fool
To lock horns with a mad bull;
Let his rage run to its end!

BRAND *[To the multitude.]*

Far from here! God is not here
Nor can with such vermin be!

Fair with freedom is the sphere
Where in majesty reigns He!

*[He shuts and locks the church-door and
takes the keys in his hands.]*

Here I am no longer priest.
My donation I recall;
None shall have the keys from me
To inaugurate this feast.
Would you enter, serfs of clay,
Wriggle in, the cellar way!
Limber are your backs, so crawl!
Through the foul, exhausted air
Of the noisome basement there.
Let your vile breath like an asp,
Pestilential, fan the ground
Like a faint consumptive's gasp!

[He pitches the keys into the fjord.]

THE SHRIEVE

[Aside and with an air of relief.]

After that, no knight is he!

THE DEAN *[In like manner.]*

Good! No bishop will he be!

BRAND

Come, ye young, intrepid, sound!
From your spirits let a gust
Of true life whisk off the dust
Of this cavern! Follow me!
Follow me to victory!
For you must some day awake,
Some day, nobler grown, must break

Your foul truce with compromise.
Rise, now ; from your slackness rise !
Rise from insincerity !
Rise and smite your enemy !
One must perish, that one live ;
Then let each no quarter give !

THE SHRIEVE

Hold, I'll read the riot act !

BRAND

Read it ; with you I break pact !

THE MULTITUDE

Lead ! We follow where you go !

BRAND

Over mountains, clad with snow,
Through the nation let us fare,
Loosing every spirit-snare
That entangles—elevating,
Cleansing, soul-emancipating—
Crushing imbecility.

Let us men, priests, prophets be !
Worn-out coin we'll mint anew,
Make a temple of the State !

[The multitude and among them the sacristan and the schoolmaster gather around him. Brand is borne aloft on their shoulders.]

MANY VOICES

Great the age is ! Omens great
Shine, this glorious noonday through !

[The mass of men stream upward through the valley, a few remain behind.]

THE DEAN

[To those who were departing.]

Blind and dazed, what would you do?
Saw ye not the devil's head
Peeping from each word he said?

THE SHRIEVE

Friends, turn back! You're suited to
Our own harbor, smooth and still!
Stay, I pray you! Men, you will
All be ruined, murdered, worse!
H'm, they answer not, the curs!

THE DEAN

Think of homes left desolate!

VOICES FROM THE MULTITUDE

Nobler habitations wait!

THE SHRIEVE

Fields and growing crops leave you—
Sheep and cattle—

THE VOICES

Heaven's dew
Sacred manna daily shed
Whereupon the chosen fed.

THE DEAN

Your deserted wives implore.

THE VOICES

[From the distance.]

Who deserts, is ours no more!

THE DEAN

"Father's gone!" . . . the child laments thus!

THE WHOLE COMPANY

"Either for us or against us!"

THE DEAN

[Gazes after them for a long time with folded arms, and then says despondently:]

All the parish me desert;
The old shepherd stands alone,
Plundered even to his shirt!

THE SHRIEVE

[Shakes his fist after Brand.]

His the shame and the disgrace!
Triumph soon shall be our own!

THE DEAN *[Almost weeping.]*

Triumph? They are from us led!

THE SHRIEVE

Yes, but we are far from dead
If I understand the case!

[He sets out after them.]

THE DEAN

Zounds! The shrieve is going, too!—
After them? My soul, 't is true!
Life is filled with such surprises.
Ho, again my courage rises;
Thither, too, I'll turn my course,
Catch them, capture what I can!
Put the saddle on, my man;
Fetch a safe, sure-footed horse!

[Exeunt all.]

Curtain.

[*On the highest saeter in the parish. In the background the landscape rises above them into lofty and barren mountains. It is foggy weather. Brand leading the multitude, men, women, and children, comes up the slope.*]

BRAND

Press onward, thither victory flies!
Below our feet the parish lies,
Hemmed in; from hill to hill the rain
Has spread its cloudy counterpane.
Forget that in yon gloomy spot
You slumbered; oh, remember not,
Remember not that such things be!
Ye men of God, soar high and free!

ONE MAN

My poor, old father's weary; stay!

ANOTHER

I have not broken bread today.

SEVERAL

Sire, sate our hunger, slake our thirst!

BRAND

Press on across the mountain, first!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Which way?

BRAND

What boots it? Either way,
If so but to our goal we keep!
Come this way!

ONE MAN

No! That road is steep
And dangerous enough by day;
Nightfall will catch us on the way.

THE SACRISTAN

The ice-church lies in that direction.

BRAND

The steep road makes the short connection.

ONE WOMAN

My child is ill.

ANOTHER

My feet are sore.

ANOTHER

Where can I find a drop to drink?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Priest, satisfy their wants before
Their courage falls, their spirits sink!

MANY VOICES

Work miracles; do wonders, sire!

BRAND

Oh, foul upon you has the hand
Of slavishness imposed its brand;
Your compensation you require
Ere you your meed of service do.
Shake off this deadly sloth from you!
Else once again depart from life!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Yes, first press onward to the strife;
We know that our reward 's secure.

BRAND

That is it; that it is, as sure
As God's eye compasses the sphere!

MANY VOICES

He is a prophet.

SEVERAL OF THE COMPANY

Hear! Oh, hear
And tell us: Will the fight be long?

OTHERS

Will it be bloody? Are they strong?

ONE MAN

Is one expected to be brave?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

At all events, my life I 'll save?

ANOTHER MAN

What is my share of what is won?

A WOMAN

I will not have to lose my son?

THE SACRISTAN

When will we win the victory?
By Tuesday?

BRAND

Ask ye such of me?
What mean ye?

THE SACRISTAN

First, how long will we
Be in the battle? At what cost?
What's to be gained? What to be lost?
In fine, the off'ring and reward?

BRAND

Such ask ye?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Yes, below we formed
No clear idea in that regard.

BRAND [Aroused.]

Not long shall ye be uninformed.

THE MULTITUDE

[*Throngs closer about him.*]

Say on!

BRAND

How long this war will be?
Till life is over, till ye bring
Your last and dearest offering, . . .
Till ye are rendered truly free
From every taint of compromise, . . .
Till to direct your wills, ye rise, . . .
Till every craven doubt shall fall
Before the mandate: "Nought or all!"
Your off'ring? All idolatries,
All half-sincere hypocrisies,
All bonds of fleshly slavery
Gilded or polished though they be,
All pillows of ignoble ease!
The victor's prize? Will's purity, . . .
Faith's surer reach, soul unity,
The sacrificial will that gave
Itself rejoicing to the grave, . . .
A crown of thorns on every brow . . .
This prize awaits all victors now!

THE MULTITUDE

[*Enraged and shouting.*]

Deceived, betrayed, undone, misled!

BRAND

I have not flinched from what I said.

SEVERAL

You promised us a victory . . .

Now ask for sacrifice, instead.

How make you such strange tales agree?

BRAND

I promised triumph; that is true.

I swear it will be won . . . through you;

But whoso in the vanguard goes,

Must look to fall before his foes.

If that he dare not, let him lay

His armor off before the fray!

The flag which faint-heart cowardice

Defends, must fall; if sacrifice

Freezes your very bones with dread,

Then ere the blow falls, you are dead.

THE MULTITUDE

He doth our very lives demand

For the good of peoples yet unborn.

BRAND

Through bypaths, thick beset with thorn,

The road lies to the promised land.

To triumph over every foe,

To triumph even in overthrow

Each true heart of this generation

I summon as God's knight!

THE SACRISTAN

Oh, yes!

Now we are in a pretty mess!

Below assured of condemnation . . .

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Yes, we would never dare return.

THE SACRISTAN

Yet to go on, not many yearn!

SOME OF THE COMPANY

Rend him asunder!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

That were worse;

We need some one to lead, of course!

THE WOMEN

[Terror-stricken, point down the road.]

The dean!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Be quiet; do not fear!

[Enters the dean, followed by several of those who remained behind.]

THE DEAN

My wand'ring sheep! Loved children! Hear

The shepherd who was yours of yore!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

[To the multitude.]

We have a home below no more.

'T is best we o'er the mountain flee!

THE DEAN

How can you grieve so sorely, me
Whose love but magnifies the hurt?

BRAND

Year after year to souls thou wert
The cause of many a sorer wound!

THE DEAN

Oh, heed him not! He hoodwinks you
With empty promises.

SEVERAL

That's true!

THE DEAN

But we have mercy; we forgive
When real penitence is found.
Let each his own case but examine
And see with what Satanic gammon
He did you trusting folk deceive,
To rally his wild cause around!

MANY

He has deceived us; that is true!

THE DEAN

Consider, friends! What can you do,
A lean flock, wretched and forlorn,
In this secluded corner born?
Are you to great deeds consecrate?
Can you bound souls emancipate?
Nay, to your daily tasks attend;
What goes beyond them, friends, is wrong.
And, are your arms for battle strong,

Use them your own homes to defend!
'Mid hawks and eagles what were you?
With bears and wolves what would you do?
You would but prove the strong man's prey;
My wand'ring sheep, I beg you, stay!

THE MULTITUDE

Woe unto us, 't is truth you say!

THE SACRISTAN

Yet closed we after us the door
When from old things we turned away;
'T would not be home now as before!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

He kindled light unto our eyes;
He showed us defects, failings, lies!
No longer doth the parish sleep;
The life which answered us of yore
Suffices unto us no more!

THE DEAN

Trust me, it will pass over soon!
If for the nonce you quiet keep,
All will resume its quondam tune;
I pledge, the parish soon will quite
Into its former order come!

BRAND

Choose, men and women!

SOME

We will home!

OTHERS

Too late, lead on across the height!
[*The shrieve enters, galloping his horse.*]

THE SHRIEVE

Thank heaven, I've overtaken you!

THE WOMEN

Oh, be not wroth at what we do!

THE SHRIEVE

Not now! Let byegone be byegone!
For us a better day doth dawn;
And if you will but speak the word,
You all are wealthy ere the night!

SEVERAL

How now?

THE SHRIEVE

A herring school's in sight . . .
Millions of herrings . . . in our fjord!

THE MULTITUDE

What says he?

THE SHRIEVE

For the catch prepare;
Leave this bleak hillside's sleet and snow!
Such schools before came never here;
Now surely better times are near
For this poor nook of Norway. Oh!
Indeed 't is time we had our share!

BRAND

Between this and God's summons choose!

THE SHRIEVE

Your own good common sense please use!

THE DEAN

Lo, here a miracle is given,
A portent handed down from Heaven!

How, often, neighbors, have I dreamed it,
But merely foolish fancy deemed it;
Now see ye what the Lord had said,
Were he to counsel you today!

BRAND

Yourselves are lost if you give way!

MANY

By thousands!

THE SHRIEVE

Millions! Millions!

THE DEAN

Bread

To feed a famished child or wife!

THE SHRIEVE

You see, friends, this is not the hour
To waste your strength in idle strife;
Especially, it should be said,
Against a much superior power
Which makes the very dean afraid!
Nay, other things before you are
Than vain tiptoeing for a star!
Himself the Lord can well defend
And Heaven has fortifications;
Mix not in others' altercations
But to your own affairs attend!
Haste now to gather from the sea
Its prize; that undertaking would
Be practical and it can be
Accomplished without shedding blood!
Without involving offerings,
It wealth and comfort to you brings!

BRAND

Across the heavens in words of fire
'T is written: "Offerings I require!"

THE DEAN

Oh, friends, if you desire to offer, . . .
Come up to see me, neighbors, one day . . .
As now for instance, say, next Sunday . . .
Contribute to the church's coffer . . .

THE SHRIVE *[Interrupting.]*

Have done, now!

THE SACRISTAN

[Aside to the dean.]

Will I keep my place?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

[In the same manner.]

And do I get my school?

THE DEAN *[In a low tone.]*

In case

You shake the people's stubbornness,
You will not find us merciless . . .

THE SHRIVE

Let us begone! Waste not a minute!

THE SACRISTAN

Yes, to your boats, all ye who know
Your own best good!

SEVERAL

The pastor, though?

THE SACRISTAN

The pastor? Let the madman go!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

The hand of God is surely in it,
As plain as print to all men's sight!

THE SHRIEVE

Forsake the priest! You will do right,
Your duty, men! He humbugged you—

SEVERAL

He lied to us!

THE DEAN

His creed's untrue!
And bear in mind, good friends, that he
Has not "*cum laude*" with his degree!

SOME

What lacks he?

THE SHRIEVE

A good character.

THE SACRISTAN

Yes, that he lacks, 't is very plain!

THE DEAN

His poor old mother sued in vain;
No sacrament he brought to her!

THE SHRIEVE

His child he murdered, virtually!

THE SACRISTAN

His wife, too!

THE WOMEN

Out upon the wretch!

THE DEAN

Bad son, bad sire, bad husband, he;
Can you a poorer Christian fetch?

MANY VOICES

He rased our old church to the ground!

OTHERS

And shut the new one in our faces!

YET OTHERS

He led us into dangerous places!

THE SHRIEVE

My scheme of building the scamp stole!

BRAND

On every brow the brand is found;
'T is easy to foretell the goal
To which this craven race is bound!

THE WHOLE COMPANY

[*With excitement.*]

Down with him! Stone him! Heed him not!
Drive him forever from this spot!

[*They chase Brand with stones, down over
the bare mountain-side. Gradually his
pursuers return.*]

THE DEAN

Oh, my dear flock! My wand'ring sheep!
Now do you to the fold return,
Where home's consoling fires burn!
The tears of penitence you weep
Will wash your eyes clear till you know
How smoothly everything will go.

Good friends, we know the Lord is good ;
He doth not thirst for guiltless blood.
And our own government, like His,
Is mild and fatherly. For this,
Harsh treatment you will not receive
From prefect, magistrate or shrieve.
I, too, am merciful alway
Like the religion of our day ;
And all of your superiors will
In peace dwell with you, and goodwill !

THE SHRIEVE

Whatso amiss you may detect
We are most willing to correct ;
And, when the first confusion's ended,
We a committee will select
To ascertain in what respect
Our creed requires to be amended.
There ought to be some priests upon it . . .
Them will the dean and I elect . . .
And, then, as you may settle on it,
Schoolmaster, bailiff, sacristan
As well as any other man
That you may offer on your side . . .
And so may all be satisfied !

THE DEAN

We'll lighten all your burdens as
The action you have taken has
Relieved mine own anxiety.
The thought makes each the best man's
match

That here a miracle should be.
Farewell! Luck to you in your catch!

THE SACRISTAN

That's to be like a Christian, gracious!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

They are so kind, unostentatious!

THE WOMEN

So gentle!

OTHERS

Unpretentious and
Forgiving, liberal and fair!

THE SACRISTAN

And to obtain their grace, the price
Involves no painful sacrifice.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Nay, they the people understand
More thoroughly than the Lord's prayer!
[*The multitude goes down the mountain-
side.*]

THE DEAN [*To the shrieve.*]

Well, now; that will improve the tone.
A change is near in everything;
For, God be praised, still such a thing
As a reaction can be known!

THE SHRIEVE

'T is to my credit that the whole
Was crushed before 't was fairly . . .

THE DEAN

Oh,

More to that miracle we owe!

THE SHRIEVE

What miracle?

THE DEAN

Of course, the shoal!

THE SHRIEVE [*With a sniff.*]

That was a falsehood out of hand.

THE DEAN

A falsehood, shrieve?

THE SHRIEVE

I had to take

The first thing that I could command;

Can such be censured when at stake

Are weighty matters?

THE DEAN

Heavens, no!

At such a juncture to have lied

Was in my judgment justified.

THE SHRIEVE

Besides, now in a day or so

When the good people are composed

Once more, what can it be supposed

To matter unto any one

Whether the victory was won

By falsehood or by truth?

THE DEAN

Tut, man;

I am no sour-faced puritan!

[*He looks across the mountain's side.*]

But look you! Truly can that be

Brand, trudging yonder?

THE SHRIVE

It is he,
A knight upon his lonely quest!

THE DEAN

No, there's another, on my word . . .
There, far behind him!

THE SHRIVE

That is Gerd.
Such following suits the fellow best!

THE DEAN [Gaily.]

When some day he is done with it,
Upon his headstone should be writ:
"Hic jacet Brand! His luck was bad;
One soul he won and she was mad!"

THE SHRIVE

[*With his finger to his nose.*]

Still, now I think of it, I've some
Doubt that the popular decree
Accords well with humanity!

THE DEAN

[*Shrugs his shoulders.*]

"Vox populi, vox Dēi!" Come!

[*Exeunt both. Curtain.*]

[*Out on the bleak, bare mountain-side. A storm is gathering and drives the clouds close down upon the snowbanks. Black peaks and pinnacles stand out here and there and then are veiled again behind the clouds, Brand enters, bruised and bleeding. He stops and looks back.*]

BRAND

Thousands set forth with me; none
With me hath the summit won!
In each bosom hope and longing
For a nobler day were thronging;
Every soul of them perceived it,
Felt the summons and received it.
When the call for offering lowered,
Dread, than their resolve, was stronger.
One man died for them, no longer
Is it base to be a coward.

*[He sinks upon a rock and gazes about him
with dread.]*

Oft I've faltered, trembling, quailing,
Hair on end with horror shrinking
As, when but a child, bewailing
My hard lot, with faint heart sinking,
I, for some misdoing censured,
Into a dark chamber ventured.
Then I calmed my wild heart's flutter,
Cheered my soul with the idea
That without there still must be a
Flood of light beyond the shutter . . .
That this darkness was not night;
And, thought I, day's blessed light,
Summer's radiance and bloom
Soon shall enter and illumine
All the dreary nooks of gloom in
This dread, specter-haunted room.
Oh, how sorely I deceived me;
Freed, but blacker night received me!

And without by grove and landing
Men in abject guise were standing;
Clinging to prized memories
And with souls entranced, they more did
That was morbid over these
Than the grief-crazed king who hoarded
The dear dust of Snefrid, yearning
For the stilled heart-beat's returning . . .
By mere crumbs of hope supported,
Opened oft the snowy cerements,
Thinking that at his endearments
The blood through the dry veins sported.
None, like him, stood up and gave
Finally its meed the grave.
Nay, not one among them saw,
"This is death's unchanging law:
"Dreams can not revivify
Bodies; bodies are to lie
"Neath the sod; their part's to give
Nourishment to things that live!"
Night, black night and night again
Over women, children, men!
"Could I but, by light on-turning,
Rescue them as brands from burning!

[*He springs to his feet.*]

Threat'ning portents see I booming
Like a hell-hunt through the gloaming!
Armed for warfare, the age stands,
Summons men to do and die,
Calls for drawn swords in their hands,
Empty scabbards at each thigh!

While their kinsmen march to battle
These small brothers, like scared cattle,
Cringe and hie them out of sight!
More and worse comes into light—
All their sordid wretchedness,
Whines of women in distress,
Men's hoarse groans and imprecations,
Ears deaf to their supplications!
On their foreheads do they print:
"We are poor folks, poor folks we,
On the barrens by the sea—
Folks, coined farthings in God's mint."
Pale, they hear the crash, supposing
Weakness that they are imposing,
From th' impending wreck will shield!
Rainbow over the May-field,
Gallant flag where are you? Where
The tri-color now, which floated
Bravely, gracefully in air
While beneath it, ardent-throated,
Did the joyous people sing,
Till that zealot of a king
This free-flowing banner split,
Cutting a pointed tongue from it?
Tongues you only use to brag;
If the dragons dare not show
Talons and teeth unto their foe,
Then no tongue needs our poor flag!
They might well have spared their cheers
And the zealot king his shears;
A four-cornered flag of peace

For all purposes suffices
When in dire extremities
The ship hails ere it capsizes.
Omens of worse things at hand
Through the gloomy future gleam.
Britain's noisome, smudgy steam
Settles darkly o'er the land . . .
Smirches all the green things, dealing
Death to every living shoot, . . .
Lowers, mixed with poison soot,
And the sun from all things stealing
Like the ashen rain, dropped down
On the doomed old Sodom town.
Hideous hath the race become!
Through the winding passages
Of the mine resounds the hum
Of the dripping waters; yes,
Smug, alert, the pigmy flock
Frees the bound ore from its rock . . .
Crook'd in body and in soul,
Peer they, burrow in the hole
With their dwarfish, greedy eyes,
For gold's shining, yellow lies!
Neither cry they out nor smile.
Brothers' deaths no bosom wringing
And one's own no triumph bringing!
They but hammer, mint and file.
Gone is light's last glimmering ray.
This whole people has forgot
That the call to will ends not
When the mortal powers give way!

Worse than ever, direr yet
Portents through the gloom appearing!
Craft, the wolf, with sneer and jeering
Doth the sun of Wisdom threat.
Cries for help to Northland come
All along the ocean's rim;
But the pigmy, sullen, dumb,
Hisses: "What is that to him?"
Let great states with freedom glow!
Let the others face the foe!
Blood we dare not sacrifice!
We are small; we lack the power
For so great an enterprise;
Therefore, dare not at this hour
Risk the welfare of our nation
As our part in earth's salvation!
Not for us the cup was drained,
Not for us the thorns, blood-stained,
Did their cruel teeth imbed
In the tortured Saviour's head!
Not for us his side was riven
By the brutal Roman's lance!
Not for us the nails were driven
Through his tender feet and hands!
We, the bottom of the list,
Dare the call to arms resist!
Not for us the cross He bore;
Stirrup-stripes for us he wore . . .
Yes, for us the cobbler's whack
Purpled down his quivering back!

*[Casts himself again upon the snow and
hides his face. After some moments he
looks up again.]*

Was I dreaming? when and how
Was I wakened? Am I now?
All is leaden, dull, cloud-hidden!
Was it but a vision bidden
Forth from a disordered mind
That this moment I beheld?
Is the image lost, forgotten
Into which man was begotten?
Is progression's spirit quelled?

[He listens.]

Hark, a song comes on the wind.

THE INVISIBLE CHOIR

[Sighing upon the breeze.]

Never, fool, shalt thou be like him!
Thou wert fashioned out of clay.
Do his bidding or deny him,
Thou shalt perish either way.

BRAND

[Repeats the words and says in a low voice,]

Woe unto me, I believe it!
Stood he not across my path
And thrust back my prayer in wrath,
Would not hear it nor receive it?
All I owned, hath He not taken?
Closed all avenues of light?
Let me to the last hour fight
And be beaten and forsaken?

THE CHOIR

[Breaks into full chorus over his head.]

Never, worm shalt thou be like Him!

Thou the cup of death hath tasted.

Imitate Him or desert Him,

Either way thy pains are wasted!

BRAND *[In a low tone.]*

Agnes! Alf! The days of leisure,

Hours of quiet, peace and pleasure,

I turned from you, one and all,

For the fray, my breast to pierce

On the sacrificial spears;

Yet the dragon did not fall.

THE CHOIR

[Gently and wooingly.]

Dreamer, thou wilt ne'er be like Him!

Thou'st thy birthright dissipated.

All thou hast would not enrich Him,

For the earth wert thou created!

BRAND

[Bursts into tears and cries aloud.]

Agnes! Alf! Come back! Alone

Am I, on the mountain bleak,

Chilled by north-wind to the bone,

Spectre-haunted, nerveless, weak . . .

[He looks up. A tiny rift appears in the cloud. It widens and a woman seems to be standing there, clad in white and with drapery about her shoulders. It is Agnes.]

THE APPARITION

[Smiles and extends her arms to him.]

Brand, I once again am here!

BRAND

[Leaps up, bewildered.]

Agnes! Agnes! What is this?

THE APPARITION

'T was a fevered fancy, dear!

Broken the delirium is.

BRAND

Agnes!

[He would go to her.]

THE APPARITION *[Screams.]*

Seek not to draw near!

See the chasm between us here!

Through it roars a torrent, streaming!

[Soothingly.]

Now no longer are you dreaming . . .

Fighting with strange things unseen!

Ill indeed, love, have you been,

Drained the bitter cup of madness,

Dreamed your wife was lost to you . . .

BRAND

You are living? Blessed be . . . !

THE APPARITION *[Interrupting.]*

Hush! Another hour will do

To give utterance to your gladness.

Time is pressing! Come with me!

BRAND

Where is Alf?

THE APPARITION

Yet living, too!

BRAND

Living? It is false.

THE APPARITION

No, true!

Living, healthy, strong and fair!

Fancied were your tribulations,

Nothing but imaginations;

All you fought with, was the air!

Alf is with your dear old mother;

They're so fond of one another!

He is tall and she is hale;

The old church is standing still,

You may rase it if you will!

Yet the good folk of the vale

Ply their tasks without surcease

As in the good days of yore.

BRAND

"Good days" said you?

THE APPARITION

Then was peace.

BRAND

Peace?

THE APPARITION

Inquire not! With me speed!

BRAND

I am dreaming.

THE APPARITION

Now no more!

Care and nursing, though, you need.

BRAND

I am strong.

THE APPARITION

Alas, not yet!

By that dreadful dream beset
Which so lately you beguiled,
You, delirious and distraught,
Would, inspired by some wild thought,
Steal once more from wife and child,—
Once again be crushed and broken
Were not healing balms bespoken!

BRAND

Give them to me!

THE APPARITION

You're the man
Who can do it; else, none can.

BRAND

What will help me?

THE APPARITION

The physician
Who so learned is, and who
Knows the matter through and through,
Found the root of your condition.
Every phantom of your fever
By three words was conjured; they
Must be scored without delay
From your memory's page forever,
Stricken from your code of living!
Three words only have been giving
All the fancies that beset you!

Think them never, would you get you
Free from their oppressive pall!

BRAND

[*Draws back from her.*]

Name them to me!

THE APPARITION

"Nought or all."

BRAND

Is that certain?

THE APPARITION

Yes, as I

Living am and you will die!

BRAND

Woe is ours! The sword hangs o'er
Drawn and threatening as before!

THE APPARITION

Brand, be mild; my breast is warm;
Hold me in your strong right arm!
Let us seek a summer clime . . .

BRAND

'T will not come another time.

THE APPARITION

Oh, it will; believe me, Brand!

BRAND

[*Shakes his head.*]

'T is behind me! Now no more
Is it fancy, as before!
Real life is now at hand!

THE APPARITION

Life?

BRAND

Yes, life! Come with me!

THE APPARITION

Stay!

What is it you think to do?

BRAND

What I must! What, till today
Was a fevered dream, make true!
What till now was dreamed, live out!

THE APPARITION

'T is impossible! Think where
It has led you . . .!

BRAND

Face about!

THE APPARITION

That dread journey would you dare,
Not delirious but awake
And with no compulsion, take?

BRAND

Freely and with open eyes!

THE APPARITION

Would your own child sacrifice?

BRAND

Offer up my child!

THE APPARITION

Oh, Brand!

BRAND

Choice is none!

THE APPARITION

With blood-stained hand
Drag me from joy's meshes and
Scourge with sacrificial rod
To the presence of your God?

BRAND

Choice is none!

THE APPARITION

In the dark night,
Put out every ray of light . . .
Shut the sunlight from you—never
Pluck life's luscious fruits nor ever
Cheered and soothed be by life's song—
Such will I remember long!

BRAND

Choice is none; waste not your prayer!

THE APPARITION

Have you then forgotten what, love,
Your reward was? In thin air
Your hopes vanished, did they not, love?
All betrayed you, like brute cattle . . .
Scourged . . . abandoned utterly.

BRAND

Not for my own gain I battle,
Nor for my own victory!

THE APPARITION

For a race yet lost in night!

BRAND

One to many may give light.

THE APPARITION

Each new generation fails!

BRAND

Much a human will avails!

THE APPARITION

Bear in mind, the Lord hath shut

Paradise from man's assault—

Hath a gulf before it put;

Over it you cannot vault!

BRAND

Longing's portals left He free!

THE APPARITION

*[Disappears with a crash. The cloud
passes over where it stood and a sharp,
piercing scream is heard as if from one
who is fleeing from attack.]*

Die! Earth hath no place for thee!

BRAND

[Stands for a time as if struck dumb.]

Off into the fog it fled;

Far along the height it sped

As a hawk a-hurtling flies!

Little finger that demand,

Meant to capture my whole hand;

'T was the soul of compromise.

[Gerd enters with a rifle.]

GERD

Have you seen the hawk?

BRAND

Yes, then . . .

Then I saw him.

GERD

Quick! Which way
Did the wretch make off again?
We will after him and slay!

BRAND

Steel cannot his armor pierce;
Though at times his flight appears
As some mortal spot were hit
By your bullet, when you try
To pursue and finish it,
Lo, he once again is nigh,
Mocking, luring you once more
Just as boldly as before!

GERD

I the hunter's rifle got . . .
Loaded it with silver shot;
Not so crazed am I, indeed,
As they say.

BRAND

May you succeed!
[*He turns to leave her.*]

GERD

Priest, you limp! Why is it?

BRAND

They
Beat me, hounded me away!

GERD

Red with blood your forehead is!

BRAND

Yes, they stoned me!

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GERD

Priest, ere this
Like a bell your voice did ring;
Now it is a rasping thing
Like the dry leaves in the fall!

BRAND

I was . . .

GERD

Well?

BRAND

Betrayed by all!

GERD

[Gazes at him with wide eyes.]

What you truly have been, father,
For the first time now I gather!
Priest I thought you; may a pest
Light upon him and the rest!
You are greatest of mankind.

BRAND

God forgive the blasphemy!
Dangerously near was I
Once to being of that mind.

GERD

Let me look upon your hands!

BRAND

What, my hands?

GERD

Nail-pierced and bleeding!
In your hair the fresh blood stands,
Which the crown of thorns, receding,
Summoned from that sacred head!

You are He who bowed with groaning
'Neath the cross, our sins atoning!
In my childhood, father said
That this happened long ago, sire,
To another, who lived far
From our parish; now I know, sire,
He but said it to betray me!
Saviour of the world you are!

BRAND

Get thee from me!

GERD

Shall I lay me
Prostrate at your feet?

BRAND

Away!

GERD

You the blood on Calvary
Shed that maketh all men free.

BRAND

I who do not know the way
To redeem my own poor soul!

GERD

Here 's my rifle! Let them die! . . .

BRAND

Maugre overthrow, will I
Yet push onward to the goal!

GERD

You already highest stand.
There are nail-prints in your hand;
You were consecrate from birth,
Noblest, greatest!

[300]

BRAND

Say no more ;

I am the vilest worm on earth !

GERD

[Looks up. The clouds lift a little.]

Know you where you stand ?

BRAND

[Looks straight ahead.]

Before

Jacob's ladder to the sky . . .

Far to climb and footsore, I !

GERD *[More wildly.]*

Nay, but know you where you stand ?

BRAND

Yes, the fog falls on each hand !

GERD

Yes, it falls and Black-Top lifts

His stern summit through the rifts !

BRAND *[Looks up.]*

Black-Top? In the ice-church?

GERD

Yes,

Still a church's guest you are !

BRAND

How I wish that I were far

From this spot! How eagerly

My heart longs for gentleness,

Hungers after light and ease,

For the church's calm and peace,

In life's summer realms to be !

[*He bursts into tears.*]

Jesus, I have wrestled with thee!
Woe is me, thou never pressed
Me unto thy sheltering breast!
By me thou dost ever slip
As glib words glide o'er the lip.
Lord, permit me now, I prithee,
But to touch the hem, bedewed
With Thy precious, saving blood!
Once! One touch alone I seek!

GERD

[*Pale.*]

Master, what is this? You weep,
Weep till tears upon your cheek
Rise like steam, in such a cloud
That the glaciers' icy shroud
Thaws and trickles down the steep,
From each rocky spur and peak;
And my ice-bound memory is
Broken into tears and sighs;
And his sacred vestment glides
From my glacier parson's sides . . . ?

[*Trembling.*]

Wherefore wept you not ere this?

BRAND

[*Clear-browed, beaming as if rejuvenated.*]
Through the law the stern path lies!
Later follow the glad days
Of the sun's soul-kindling rays!
Till today, a tablet white
Whereupon the Lord could write,

It has been my thought to be!
From today life's poetry
Shall flow bounteous and free!
The shell bursts! The tears find way!
I can kneel . . . and I can pray!

[He sinks upon his knees.]

GERD

[Looks up and mutters in a low, frightened tone,]

There he sits, the hideous!
It is he, casts over us
That black shadow. On the side
Of the peak, with pinions wide,
Beateth he with giant power;
But deliverance's hour
Is at hand if but these balls
Do but penetrate, despite all
His maneouverings, a vital . . .

*[She puts the rifle to her shoulder and fires.
A hollow crash, as of rolling thunder,
resounds from far above against the
mountain-side.]*

BRAND

[Leaps to his feet.]

What was that?

GERD

Hurrah, he falls!
I have hit him! Down he tumbles!
How his screeching echoes . . . rumbles!
See the feathers, torn away,
Drifting to us from yon height!

Oh, how big he is . . . and white!
He is rolling down this way!

BRAND

[Crouches to the ground.]

All the race's children must
For its sin return to dust!

GERD

Tenfold bigger vault the sky,
Arching o'er the summit high,
Broadened into when he fell!
Look, he plunges down, pell-mell, . . .
Pitches headlong from above!
I shall shudder now no more;
He is white as any dove!

[She screams in terror.]

Oh, the awful, awful roar!

[She casts herself down in the snow.]

BRAND

*[Crouches to meet the rushing avalanche
and looks up.]*

Tell me, Lord, while life yet fails not,
To redeem man's soul avails not
His unquenched will's "quantum satis"—?
*[The avalanche buries him from sight. It
fills the entire valley.]*

A VOICE

[Calls out through the uproar.]

He is "Deus caritatis."

[Curtain.]

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28
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